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ARNOLD ROBUR.

VOL. I.

ARNOLD ROBUR

A Nobel

BY MARTIN COMBE

AND

DUNCAN LISLE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL

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1886

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ARNOLD ROBUR.

CHAPTER I.

WANTED, A FULCRUM.

“ ’Tis a very good world that we live in
To lend, or to spend, or to give in ;
But to beg, or to borrow, or get at one’s own
’Tis the very worst world that ever was known.”

Old Adage.

It is exceedingly unpleasant to have to look a nasty thing in the face, even if its nastiness is an inevitable part of it, as is the case with the weather of our northern latitudes in November. Such, at least, is the view of what must be expected from that unlovely month which is based upon general experience. Should a really fine day occur during the course of it, the season is never allowed to get the credit.

“What a *Spring* day !” cries materfamilias in despair, as she looks at her little ones perspiring in their stifling woollen wraps ; “these changes are most trying, my dears.”

“*Summer* back again!” twitter the saucy sparrows; “what a jolly sell for those finnickin’ swallows that have taken all the trouble to go and look for it!”

Perhaps one cannot wonder, therefore, that most Novembers keep close enough to their cheerless programme of mist, dampness, and decay: the particular one which is the occasion of the present apology was, indeed, going a step farther, and in spite of its extreme youth (it had only been born a few hours) was raising such a squall round the neighbourhood of Oakleigh as few among its ten predecessors had equalled in their lustiest maturity.

All this, doubtless, was by way of making up for lost time, the autumn changes having taken place very gradually so far. “No more shilly-shallying now,” boomed the stentorian wind, and ratified the declaration by shaking the windows of the old house quite fiercely. Truly the year was “tottering to its close”—as an orator once quaintly remarked in the pulpit—“with gigantic strides!”

Some such saddening reflections as these may have been passing through the mind of Mrs. Marchpane, that queen of housekeepers, as she stood beneath a faded carriage-umbrella just outside the front door, wearing a somewhat woe-begone expression on her clear, wholesome face.

There she waited, as she had been doing at odd intervals during the last two hours and more; looking, with her gingham pent-house drawn down over her head, not unlike some wonderful toad-stool which the cold and wet had united to produce for the purpose of blocking up the doorway and keeping out the expected master.

Presently she was reinforced by the most powerful of her subjects, the housemaid.

"Now do come in, ma'am, there's a dear: to think of your standing out there in that lovely silk! It'll get all spoilt and spotted; and you know you haven't got anything else to put on 'arf so 'andsome."

"Why can't you leave me alone, Rhoda? What a girl you are, to be sure! D'ye think I can let Mr. Arnold come without my being here to say the first word to him? It's time for him to be here now: depend upon it, something's kept him. Perhaps they couldn't keep a fire up on the engine, being only men, you know,—or the wood may have got damp,—and there's been an accident. There, isn't that the sound o' wheels?"

She paused for a moment, bending her head in a listening attitude. Then she added inconsequently: "Them nasty railroads! I can't stand 'em; always going wrong and busting up, they are."

Here the gardener made his appearance, bearing vegetables and fruit in one basket, and hot-house flowers in another. He seemed to be comparatively impervious to the general moisture, being encased in several sacks which had been modified to suit his human imperfections against such emergencies as the present.

“On the look-out early, mum, you are,” observed this sackcloth impenitent, with brisk satire. “Mr. Gibbins’s only bin gone with the trap this ’arf-hour, and he had his marketin’ to do at Burfield afore the train was doo.”

The ringing of a bell, audible through the half-open door leading towards the kitchen, stopped the severe retort that the housekeeper was on the point of making to his rash levity. For a moment they all stood aghast without moving a step. The man recovered first: arguing that there must be “summat oop wi’ the bell-handle,” he proceeded to examine it gingerly, as though it communicated with a galvanic battery; and finally pronounced the phenomenon, with scarcely warrantable dogmatism, to be the fell doing of a “sperrit.”

“Jinrally they raps,” he went on, enlarging on this occult theme, “but that’s where there’s knockers. Bein’ only a bell here, in coorse this one couldn’t rap, yer see.”

But a repetition of the portent—a little louder

this time, as though the "sperrit," wherever he might be, was getting petulant at being neglected—roused Mrs. Marchpane from her inaction. Connecting cause and effect by a sudden flash she darted into the house, and bustling down the passage, burst into the dining-room.

A gentleman was seated before the comfortable hearth with his boots off, warming the soles of his feet. On beholding the incomer, however, he started up with a cry of delight.

"Why, it's you, Barbara."

He rushed forward, and hugged her against a very wet shoulder in a way quite hearty and unconventional.

As for the recipient of these attentions, she did not mind the look of the thing one jot. Any one could have seen how proud she was of it all, and how fond of him, as she patted his hand before trying to say her word of welcome to this fine, bearded fellow, her foster-child, the little weakling of old days whom she could hardly believe that she herself had once nursed.

"And what a cross, tyrannical old nurse you were too," laughed he, "weren't you, Barbara? I may call you by that name still? You were Barbara to them, you know."

He pointed to a portrait over the fireplace of a young couple holding each other in a half-playful, half-loving caress.

Mrs. Marchpane looked at the picture, and dried her eyes; for the casements of her affectionate soul were as moist as the window-panes at that moment.

"Mr. Arnold," she said, turning them back on his face, "they are not here to be loved any more. But, thank God, you are with us again safe and hearty: may you live long to carry on their honoured name."

People seldom realise how largely the admixture of happiness which their lives contain is due to servants and humble friends,—“inferiors,” as they are called. Fortunately for us, the “constant service” of *Cana Fides* is still among the few things which are not yet articles of commerce, nor are there any signs at present that it will ever be classed among the defunct characteristics of “the antique world.”

“But la, sir,” said the housekeeper, now quite recovered, “however did you manage to get in without our seeing or hearing a suspicion of you? Rhoda Dandrum and me have been staring down the drive with all our eyes every now and again the whole blessed day. Mine are getting dim, I know; but that girl’s ought to be as keen as keen at her age. But everything’s altered now-a-days, sir; the very housemaids aren’t what they were, by a good deal,” and the old body fetched a sigh as she lighted the candles, to try

and make Arnold believe that even his coming left some things to be desired.

He laughed as he warmed himself at the fire.

“Rhoda would have to keep her eyes at the back of her head if she had wanted to see me come in by the conservatory without her turning round. Were the girls made like spiders in your young days, Barbara? The fact is, I came by an earlier train than I had intended, and left it at the junction, fifteen miles away, this morning. The guard undertook to have my luggage taken care of at Burfield till Gibbins should come for it. The weather looked promising; so I thought I would give myself the treat of walking over the old ground again, and get gradually used to the idea of having really come home at last to take possession on my own account. And it *was* fine when I started,” he added, eyeing a barometer in the corner rather ruefully.

“My certies!” exclaimed Mrs. Marchpane, holding up a pair of plump hands, “to think of your having had a fine morning so near here! It’s enough to make one almost hopeful again. Well, I must go and look after Joshua; he ought to be back. I’ve had your dinner laid in the library, sir, as being more snug and home-like for one; and it’ll be ready as soon as you are.”

“All right, Barbara,” shouted Arnold, as he began to climb the staircase to his bed-room.

The housekeeper waited at the bottom of the flight till a door in the upper regions closed on his cheery whistle. Then she stole back to the dining-room, and gazed again at the picture over the oak mantelpiece.

“He’s just like both of them, and he isn’t like either,” murmured she;—a remark which may not have been exactly logical, but was certainly true. The dead parents were equally, and without any visible preponderance on either side, responsible for their child’s manner as well as for his physical proportions. To his old nurse it might well seem that these two points of resemblance together furnished a tolerably safe index to his character. His exterior was the happiest interfusion of her old master and mistress, and she had unconsciously arrived at a similar conclusion already with regard to those qualities of his nature which lay more out of sight.

Mrs. Marchpane had not, it must be admitted, studied Darwin, and knew absolutely nothing about Association and Inheritance, even when those beautiful words were not spelt with capital initials. Consequently she had gone through life without the least attempt at theorising about the twin factors which make us what we are. But perhaps she was as wise as her neighbours for all practical purposes.

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Arnold stayed long over his dinner, helping it down with a book, as was his wont. To-night, however, it was not the reading that hindered him: he was meditating in a desultory way on the year that had elapsed since he left college; on his foreign experiences, and how glad he was to be at home again, no longer bound to live with his guardian and conform more or less to his opinions. Mr. Dalton had discharged his duties with sufficient tact and amiability, it was true; but Arnold loved independence, and there—he was glad it was all over, and he was free to begin life entirely on his own plan.

He rose with a sigh that was not altogether one of relief, however, and rang to have the table cleared. Afterwards he sat down in his arm-chair to enjoy some delicious coffee (he knew how to make it for himself) and a cigar.

Nevertheless, these things did not form the sum total of happiness in Arnold's eyes: even now he was haunted by a dissatisfaction none the less poignant because it was vague. Not that asceticism appeared to him one whit more hopeful: surely the laborious, or the delicate mode of living was but an accident, something to be classed with things indifferent, of no real significance as determining a man's character and aims.

"I am certain," thought he, "that were I

suddenly uprooted out of this pleasant spot, and set down somewhere else under entirely different circumstances, I should feel just as I do now, as soon as I had time to think."

What are the conditions of happiness is a question which must be left to each of us to solve in his own way. It is a matter of private temperament in every case. One thing is clear enough, however: a man must be at peace with himself before he can do much good in the world. Now with most men the inferior rabble of impulses and desires are kept in orderly subjection by some one or other dominant impulse. They are not harassed by making perpetual reference to an immutable standard of right and wrong. But there are a few whose souls are not to be suffered to canker through inaction: their reason mistrusts itself; they are stretched on the rack till they can solve their life's riddle. Usually they find themselves in this plight through the interposition of some hiatus between the preparation for, and the actual commencement of, the business of living. This probably comes about with the discovery that the ideals which they have hitherto cherished are delusive or insufficient; and when these have once been impugned, should they fail to stand the tests of maturity, their votaries not unnaturally despair, and lose faith in their own principles.

Thus was it with Arnold Robur when he left Cambridge, nor was it different with him on his return to Oakleigh after a whole year of foreign travel. His difficulty had only been postponed, not disposed of: it looked more urgent now than it had ever done before.

So, as he sat there, the first blush of pleasure at his latest change of scene faded from his face, expelled by the paleness of suffering. The fire died down in the grate, and left it grey with dusty ashes. Arnold had a fancy that it was preaching to him the parable of his own existence,—a crumbling, death-in-life affair at best. Never had his need for intellectual sympathy made itself so felt.

“Shall I take counsel with Armitage?” said the young man to himself, as he rose and lit his candle: “I suppose he would lecture me on this ‘Age of Unfaith,’ and thank me for giving him such an excellent cue. Well, I know all that—the ‘vaunted mentalism,’ the ‘craving for religious æstheticism,’ and all the rest of it.”

He made a slight grimace—to be accounted for, perhaps, by the fact of some melted grease from the candle falling on to his fingers.

“Then there’s Paston: he promised to come down to-morrow, so he did. I shall wait and see what he makes of it.”

He yawned, and rubbed his eyes.

“Oh for an Œdipus to undertake the job of quelling the monster for me!”

Perhaps this young man was all the harder to satisfy from one small peculiarity which many admirable sceptics manage to do without. This was that he desired above all things to hold some adequate belief. His scepticism was not held for scepticism's sake: but the presence of this very element, painful as it made Arnold's state of mind, brought a latent force to bear which in itself had a healthy tendency. Again, he was capable of much enthusiasm, though it was as natural for him to restrain it till his judgment should approve as is the instinct which prevents a pack of hounds from starting off in full cry before they have found anything to hunt. Moreover, he had a commendable horror of affectation and publicity: he did not pretend to aspirations that were none of his, posing as hero or emancipator; he had never stooped to discard the Deity with magnificent self-commiseration before a debating society, or ape the Promethean vein at fashionable soirées. Gesticulating on such a topic had always seemed to him contemptible. In short, he was too much in earnest to grin through a horse-collar for other people's amusement.

The next morning was spent by Arnold in the way best calculated to soothe his spirit—at the

piano. The instrument wanted using, but was otherwise in good repair, as the library, where it stood, was always kept warm and dry on account of the books. Music was Arnold's chief solace ; in spite of certain superficial angularities, —corners which time had not yet rounded,—his was one of those highly-favoured organisations that can take to themselves wings whenever a sweet melody is sounded, and escape from the jarring noise of mundane affairs. Poor mortals who have not this divine gift of abstraction must bear the din incessantly, till the true music loses its power over them in the roar and rush of other things, and their ears get dull of hearing as their eyes of seeing.

Conversing thus with the Muse of Harmony our friend forgot all time—except, to be sure, that which regulates such intercourse ; and it was not until he heard a footstep in the hall outside that he ceased. In another moment he was grasping his visitor's hand, and dragging him into the room.

Mr. Robert Paston was a young man of twenty-eight, and was therefore some four years older than Arnold. His face was, however, that of a man nearer forty than thirty, partly owing to the abundance of hair upon his cheeks, which looked as though it might have been successfully transplanted from his crown, for he was getting

prematurely bald. His general appearance was staid and massive, yet withal kindly. There is much attraction in a twinkling eye set in a wholesome, beaming face. Some eyes, indeed, there are which go on twinkling so pertinaciously as to make it a thing quite cheap and unmeritorious. Their reason for doing so is often sufficiently obscure to set their friends off on a fool's errand thinking how to find one ; and lo, there is none. When Paston twinkled, however, it was with meaning, as on the present occasion.

“ Ah, Robur, happy fellow ! Who would not wish himself in your place, to be able to sit down at ease after a late breakfast, and dream away the hours ? Do you know how long you have been over your voyage to the clouds ? Not you.”

Arnold acknowledged that he had risen that morning with the intention of meeting Paston at Burfield station about two o'clock. “ And now it's nearly three,” remarked the latter delightedly. Then he added, with tentative diplomacy, “ Still time for lunch.”

“ Stay,” said this jovial ascetic, when they were seated at that meal of widely varying custom and observance ; “ unseal not that coy amphora on my account, my genial Thaliarchus ; let the rich Cæcuban stay in its two-eared crock for me. Nay, my friend, with none of them—

from Oporto's luscious berry to the light and not inebriating Sabine dinner-claret—will I moisten my weasand this day, thank you. 'The fact is, I've been making a night of it,—an unusually bad one,—and it's given me a fit of the blues—temperance colour, you know.'

The doctor spoke gaily; but Arnold noticed his hand tremble as he poured some water into a tumbler, and drank it slowly.

"When I tell you that I only snatched a couple of hours' sleep this morning before coming down here, and that on the top of a remarkably lively case of D. T., you will perhaps cease to wonder at my sudden devotion to Adam's Entire."

He took another pull at the water, and proceeded:

"You see, the poor wretch had been one of my old chums." The doctor did not say how much he had tried to do for this man when he was himself serving a hard medical apprenticeship, or how involuntary had been the companionship thus forced upon him: "Yes, we walked the wards together at St. Fawkes'. He was entrapped into marrying a barmaid from some big restaurant or other; that's how it was. Of course their conjugal felicity didn't last long, and she left him for some other fellow; but I am pretty sure he'll never feel that, or any other loss, again. I shall never forget one afternoon at the end of a

fortnight he spent with me just before he took to his bed. It hadn't dawned upon me, somehow, what was up with him till then : a sort of passing queerness may have been observable before, but that day it settled down on him in the most unmistakable way. He had been playing the strangest antics while I was out, they told me ; and when I opened the door, and saw him with his hat on and his coat off, knocking over imaginary skittles, and conversing brightly all the while with a crowd of spectral pals, my worst fears were realised.

“Directly he saw me he left the game, and came towards me with reproachful expostulation written in every feature. ‘Paston,’ said he, ‘why will you always be running after that brute Muckford? The fellow’s nothing but a billiard-marker, and a low cad at that. That’s just what he is, pained as you must be to hear it of a friend of yours. But I think nothing of that, so you’re warned in time. Don’t lend him any more, now don’t ; and have nothing more to say to him. Already he’s got you into more than one ugly thing,—there, you needn’t try to deny it. Anyhow, I’ll do the best I can for you, we always have been like brothers together.’ Then, with lowered voice, and rather nervously, ‘I’m not speaking too loud, am I? D’ye think he can hear yonder? You can see him over my shoulder.’

“Putting some constraint upon myself, I did not attempt to brazen out my ignorance of Muckford, and his nefarious practices, to this keen-eyed Mentor. ‘That’s right,’ said he absently, when I promised to do better in future. ‘I told him to wait for it in the garden,’ he added, turning to the window. ‘Wait for what?’ said I, wondering what would happen next. ‘Why, the sixpence, of course, the one I gave you to keep for me when these chaps came in.’ ‘Here it is,’ said I, mechanically producing a coin. ‘Hulloa there, Muckford,’ shouted my patient, snatching it from my hand, and throwing up the sash. ‘Catch, Muckford. Got it? All right. You know where to take it. Mind he measures out the liquor on the square, and don’t you dip *your* beak into it.’ With that he chucked the sixpence out into my vacant back-yard, and sat down with a look of calm anticipation on his face. Needless to say, however, his invisible genius never returned with the grog, and may have drunk himself to death in the bar of the Green Man with the earnings of his treachery, for aught I know. Enough to make one laugh, isn’t it? but upon my word I was as near doing the other thing at the time.”

“It is astonishing how persistently one is disposed to find comedy in everything,” resumed Paston after a pause. “Did you ever hear of

the parson who managed to behave with due decorum at the burial of a parishioner, but gave way completely to a most disgraceful fit of merriment immediately afterwards, upon being informed that ‘ the corpse’s brother-in-law ’ wanted to see him in the vestry ? ”

Arnold knew and respected a genuinely deep sympathy in his friend for all things human, nor was he to be deceived by the harmless affectation of a mocking tone behind which Paston sometimes attempted to conceal it. There was, indeed, a thorough understanding between these two, and none the less so for the reticence of each in manifesting it. Here in England men feel more than they are able to express. The air, according to a reason given by Milton, is too cold for us to be continually opening our mouths, like the dwellers under warmer skies ; and hence it comes that, from being undemonstrative, we are liable to seem unfeeling to our more voluble neighbours.

It will be observed that Paston was by no means of that legitimate order of family physicians whose professional attendance has been deemed requisite for the sanity of the bulk of fiction from the days of Sangrado and Slop. That he belonged to the same honourable profession as those worthies cannot be denied, but it is an accident for which he alone is responsible. Of course he might have selected a less frequented,

if not more interesting, walk in life : he might have been a junior lord of the Admiralty, a writer in the *Times*, or even a novelist. It would have been interesting to have known him under either of the first two capacities, at any rate. But the "stubborn realism" of history may not be paltered with : he was a doctor, and one who did not vary his engagements by lecturing on Socialism, or playing the bass drum. He was not a typical doctor, either ; within that charmed circle he was looked upon askance by some of the elders of the craft. Doubts of his orthodoxy had been whispered ; and Dr. Kachuma Lyvo, who lived in the same street in London, had been known to cross himself, and hiss out the deadly word "homœopath" when the shadow of Paston's neat brougham crossed his dining-room windows.

"As you have settled with your partner to stay over to-morrow," said Arnold, as they rose from the table, "I have arranged to take you to dine with the Daltons. They are old friends of my father's, and I used to spend my holidays from school and college mainly at their house. Of course they have often heard about you from me, and are dying to behold you in the flesh. I wonder whether you'll fall in love with Grace."

Paston smiled grimly : "I suppose that's a young lady's name : you should make her mistress of Oakleigh, the house is big enough for

two. You have everything else, and only want to fill the cup of happiness simultaneously with the vacant chair."

"Not a bit of it," replied Arnold, playfully dismissing the other's insinuation, "you won't find much love-sickness about me, I assure you."

But the doctor persisted :

"What! You mean to tell me that there is nothing grievous in a fate harder than was laid on the much-enduring Ithacan! After all his hardships he at least found a fair Penelope to welcome him back. I'm afraid you want to be educated up to that still, Robur."

The allusions of this well-meaning person were apt to be rather irritating, although he was quite aware that the display of attainments is not inconsistent with superficiality in them and their owner. In the present instance, however, his companion was merely amused.

"I don't think I could get on without a Penelope," he returned, "and I have a most efficient one in Mrs. Marchpane, to say nothing of her allowing no followers in the housekeeper's room."

Then they fell to discussing the inexhaustibly congenial topic of their university careers. It was due to Cambridge that they had ever met at all—in the room of a common acquaintance, an old schoolfellow of Arnold's. They had fraternised at once, losing no time in cultivating each

other's society. Paston was considerably his friend's senior in standing, and as a consequence left Cambridge long before him. But frequent visits on both sides kept up the intimacy which was now, after five years' duration, no less close than it had ever been. On the conclusion of his course at the hospital the doctor's friends had bought him a share in a flourishing practice. His partner was an elderly man who had a house out of town, and liked to spend as many evenings out of the week as possible in his retirement. Paston found his solitude at Wimpole Street rather unbearable when work was slack enough to allow him to notice it, and was always glad to get a friend to share it with him. He was getting on well, and fast paying back what had been laid out in securing for him so desirable a position.

Before retiring for the night the doctor expressed his willingness to enliven Arnold with a song, if the latter could accompany him without laughing. This was not an easy matter, as he stood at the other end of the grand piano, and shouted the words defiantly at his accompanist's head in a way more healthy than polite. They sang many of the old ballads together, gems rich with clustered associations that can never die. They are with the child who hears them for the first time ; he seems to recognise and hail them

as old friends. If he were older, he might believe that he had heard them in some former state from the Hours' rosy lips, or chanted by Time himself, before he had gotten his elf-locks and keen scythe. Transmigration of souls becomes an innocent truism when the ears are tickled by one of these familiar ditties.

The entertainment concluded with a song by the entertainer. It was a setting of Pistol's famous lines,

“Why, then the world's mine oyster,
Which I with sword will open.”

Arnold's mind was still running on it when he lighted his guest upstairs to his room.

“I wish you could supply a lever for *me* to insert between the old bivalve's jaws, my dear fellow,” he said half involuntarily; “I shouldn't know what to do with a sword. But then where is the fulcrum to come from? I never thought of that.”

The doctor did not understand: he was sleepy, and not in the mood for piecing together stray hints with suppressed contexts.

So he wondered what it could mean till his eyes closed; and then something made him dream of Grace Dalton.

CHAPTER II.

PROFESSIONAL ADVICE.

“Modo hoc modo illud probabilius videtur.”—*Cicero*.

WHEN Robinson Crusoe left his island and the society of his parrots, goats, and cannibals, he must have found the great world more lonely than the solitude which his indomitable patience has made an enchanted bower to so many of us. And so his history goes on to relate that it was not very long before he returned. One moral of his life is that a man may live in unwelcome retirement and yet find an amount of excitement sufficient for a rational mind. How meagre and ineffectual that footprint on the sands would have been at Brighton or Margate ! Still, his time was not generally spent in discovering footprints. Until the inestimable and immortal Friday joined Defoe's hero, the only conversation he could enjoy was that of parrots, whose capacities are generally limited. And even when Friday was present, Robinson Crusoe's life may fairly be regarded as

retired. 'From which we may observe that, once a man has tasted the sweets of retirement, he is loath to give them up altogether. Even complete severance from society would hardly be more wearisome than an unceasing round of calls. We like humanity better when we have an occasional breathing space, so that we may view it as a whole. Consider the sad fate of the popular man—the luckless being of whom it is averred that no gathering is complete without him. At the 'Varsity he becomes willy nilly a frequenter of "wines,"—he has no time to call his own. He moves in a perpetual circle of gaieties: he is introduced to everybody: he is asked everywhere. But leisure for contemplation he has none. The crowd of figures passing before his eye blurs the ideals he may have formed: he is liked by everybody, likes nearly everybody, and has very little chance of getting beyond liking in the active or passive. He has too many corners rubbed off to have a very strong individuality.

But that is no reason why a man may not become a favourite in a circle, with a reasonably extended reputation for good fellowship among the better sort. The great cause of degeneration is a somewhat vulgar sham delicacy which makes so many people shrink from nothing so much as the slightest difference of opinion with a com-

panion. Laying down the law is one thing; having an opinion is another. People are apt to forget that strong natures are not attracted by obsequiousness, while outspoken disagreement is often the shortest cut to a real intimacy, and without it no friendship is worth the name. However, the popular people seem to like their position;—presumably they do not deserve our pity.

The friendship between Paston and Robur was of the outspoken kind, and Arnold knew that there was no likelihood of any shilly-shallying or concealment in such advice as he might extract from the other. So the next morning he tried to unburden his soul, while his friend gravely sat and smoked.

“It’s the old business,” he said in conclusion; “I did have some hopes that a year’s gadding about among new scenes and people might help to cure me: but it hasn’t. So now, Paston, I want a plain answer to a plain question. What is your view of my case? I don’t believe it’s disease myself, but I want your opinion on the point.”

“Liver, my dear fellow—unquestionably liver, if you ask me as a general practitioner. Liver is responsible for everything now-a-days. But putting aside that explanation, as an easy professional dodge for getting over the difficulty, I

should say it is constitutional; but it's just as likely to be health as disease. Now as I understand you," said the doctor critically, "you are a man—correct me if I'm wrong—who fancies himself without ground under his feet, in the matter of religion and most other things. You have in fact developed agnosticism in the ordinary course of nature. With most people that is a plant which only takes feeble root after the most careful attention has been bestowed on it. First, the soil has to be prepared, which is admirably done by the injudiciousness of parents and spiritual pastors and masters generally; a process whose wonderful efficacy you have perhaps scarcely realised fully. Then comes the individual's own pruning, weeding, and watering; and when it has been carefully stowed away in a hothouse, our gardener begins to flatter himself that his industry has finally disposed of the baneful influence of cant, vagueness,—save the mark—superstition, unreason, and all the other weeds which before choked up his scientific Eden, and hindered the modest exotic's growth. That is the thing they spell with a capital A; and a very pretty specimen it is of what can be done by laborious artificial contrivance. The gardens of Alcinous were nothing to it. But then you see," quoth Paston, fixing his eyes on the smoke that curled towards the ceiling, "to be kept alive it

must be nourished in identically the same way as the old ideas—namely by dogma. Of course it has been variously re-baptised; but the chief difference between the new religion and the older ones is that while faith and dogma were in them complementary, this asserts the glorious self-sufficiency of dogma, and its ability to take care of itself. Why some of 'em don't buckle to and write an epic on it puzzles me—it can't be for want of imagination. 'Paradise Dispensed with' would be a novel and effective title. Oh, I know, I know," continued the lecturer, waving his hand to forbid interruption from Arnold, who seemed inclined to speak, "you don't belong to that set. A little 'a' would satisfy your modest requirements. I'm coming to your symptoms. They aren't new to me, though they don't correspond to anything I ever felt myself. My diagnosis is founded simply on observation. Now I take it, you occasionally feel an impulse to seek some sort of distraction, don't you?"

"Distraction? yes," said Arnold, puffing viciously at his pipe. "I've been hunting for distraction in every capital—not to say every village—on the continent for the last twelve months,—and a precious lot of good it's done me. I should plunge in the giddy vortex of the stock exchange, or set saddle on a hobby and ride it to death, if I thought there was any permanent

comfort to be got out of it. Model landlordism isn't a particularly bracing tonic either. Oh, I went into my tenants' affairs with zeal, I assure you, and promised a reduction of rent for three years, which was all very well in its way. They're blessed with flowers and fruit from my garden, and I let them trespass pretty much as they like. That may work them up to treating me with comparative confidence, and some interest will attach to the attempt to stir up the fine old crusted Tories of the neighbourhood to do something of the same sort. But these things don't take long; and I tell you I want an aim which will stand wear."

"Well, I don't keep aims ready made in stock, and don't see my way to providing you just now. As for a fellow with more than enough coin on his hands spending his time toiling and spinning for superfluous pelf, it seems to me that would be a waste of energy—unless he sees his way to laying it out better than his neighbours. And just at present you don't seem to be seeing your way to anything in particular. It's no use your hunting around for labour—it'll come some time. But you can't go off solving the problems of the universe before you've settled some of your own private ones. Now there are some people," said Paston, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and pausing to blow away some of the

dust which had found its way on to his coat,—
“there are some people who would tell you that devoted self-sacrifice is the correct card to play—come forward as the champion of the oppressed costermonger, or sweep, or somebody. Start a society, provide the funds, appoint yourself permanent hon. sec., and there you are with divine opportunities for writing unlimited letters. Only you’d be a fraud.”

“Just so.”

“You see these friends of ours are excellent folks: but they forget that after all there is a tolerable evenness in the distribution of happiness. If you hunt for deserving pauperism, your chance of finding it is small. Keep close, and don’t make platform-business of your philanthropy, and some day you may do some real good to some one. Besides, the poor are always with us. But as for a man like you, Robur, shirking these private difficulties, and refusing to look them fairly in the face, it would be rank cowardice. Thank the Lord, you can’t plead necessity as an excuse. You’ve a hundred times better chances than the poor beggars who have to take opinions on trust—or go without them—for hire. If there is good stuff in them they only get a temporary release, and that at the very time of life when they’re best fitted for tussling with the foe. The worse for them when they are laid on the shelf

in old age, warped by all manner of custom and meaningless observance, with the real battle of life still to be fought, and Goliath brandishing his weaver's beam like a tennis-racket. What odds will you take for their victory then, young David? But you have your sling, with a reasonable chance of finding five smooth stones in a brook or elsewhere. Anyhow, you're bound to try."

Arnold laughed. "It strikes me I should get some one to stir up the magnanimous Gibbins to challenge me to mortal combat," he said. "You'd make an admirable second."

"Well, I might keep people from treating your wounds idiotically, and feeding you on pig's chine and Pramnian wine, like the sons of Æsculapius. But, bar joking, Robur, do get about the business in earnest. If you and your spiritual brethren would only manage to get your affairs settled a bit, society would be vastly improved."

"I should like to think so, certainly. But then we *don't* get our affairs settled, which is against it."

"I tell you what it is, Robur," said Paston, rising and taking up a position of vantage on the hearthrug, from whence he addressed Arnold dictatorially, "my own belief is that half of this generation's difficulties are due to the feeble inadequacy of our speculative scepticism. We

investigate—bless you, we investigate ; but we set about it without any method. We take the instruments in our hands, and instead of scientific probing and dissecting we stick them in haphazard anyhow, and kick up a row because the result is that we only make confusion worse confounded. The grand principle is classification ; but we only jumble. We ought to classify the disturbing elements. Classify the devil and he will flee from you.”

“ ’Tis the voice of a Cantab, I heard him declare
If you classify well you need never despair,”

improvised Arnold. “ Well, your suggestions are certainly encouraging, and I’ll do my level best to follow them.”

The doctor was reassured by his tone. “ Well, you won’t repent it, if prophesying is safe. The main point is to fight the battle honestly and manfully without shirking. Still, I don’t recommend you to spend your whole time over it ; you’d be apt to get morbid. You want some sort of occupation, to keep you in a healthy frame of mind. You’re a musician, of course, and that’s a wonderful safeguard ; because, so far as I can see, there is nothing to which his Infernal Highness has such an ineradicable objection. I don’t know if David was the first party who found that out when they sent for him with his harp to play to

Saul ; but if he was, he deserved a deal of credit. There's nothing like it for exorcising the fiend—except when it's going on next door in the shape of scales and five-finger exercises : then it seems to tell the other way. But you can't always have music, and there's no possible reason for going on with only one string to your bow. Why not try writing ?”

“H'm. What am I to write ? I don't yearn to fill editorial waste-paper baskets, or see my works in a bookshop, labelled ‘all this lot, quite new, reduced 2s. 6d.’ It's humiliating.”

“My dear fellow, you needn't be alarmed ; I'm proud to say that I can pretty well secure you from the ignominy you mentioned first. The blameless Bloss, godlike editor of the *Hebdomadal Tuba Mirabilis*, vulgarly known as the *Weekly Startler*, honours me by having adopted me as the guardian of his body's health, and he'll accept any recommendation from me like a shot. In his columns, you will find an admirable escape-valve for the seethings of your colossal brain. A light review now and then might put you in spirits. I'll introduce you to some of the staff,” said Paston, dropping into his chair again ; “they're a queer lot, and you'll be amused.” And so the question was settled after a discussion which afforded considerable satisfaction to both parties, and went some way to cementing an already

strong friendship ; as outspoken discussions generally do.

In the evening they went over according to appointment to dine with Mr. Dalton and his family. Beau Séjour, as the owner's wife had insisted on naming the place, was a pleasant enough house within a mile of Burfield : newer than Oakleigh, as Mr. Dalton himself had built it. That gentleman received his visitors with the hospitable urbanity which was characteristic of him. "Mrs. Dalton will be delighted to see you," he said to the doctor, after a somewhat ceremonious greeting. "She has been longing to make your acquaintance, after all we have heard about you from Arnold." To which Paston mumbled some vague reply, and felt embarrassed. It was like being told suddenly that he was down on the programme for a speech or a comic song. This was the host's artful method of atoning for his better-half's peculiarities. Thus was he fain to persuade his guests that his wife's shortcomings were a careful disguise, concealing the most heart-felt interest in her neighbours' welfare. Unhappily, however, the plan did not meet with the success it deserved, the true state of affairs being somewhat too palpable.

Hardly had Mr. Dalton finished these polite observations when their refutation appeared in flesh and blood, rather excessively adorned, at

the door : followed by a pretty and rather prim-looking young lady with fair hair and hazel eyes.

Mrs. Dalton herself was a stately dame, with features that had by no means lost the good looks that characterised them in youth. Stately, perhaps, is not a very accurate word to employ in describing her, for she moved with a certain amount of rustling and bustling which was not very dignified : “buxom,” in its modern and very incorrect usage, would convey a more accurate impression of her appearance. She had hardly entered the room before she broke silence.

“Dear me, Arnold, how funny it seems to see you again to be sure, and so changed you are ! Well I declare, if you haven’t grown a beard ! now really, that is too dreadful of you. And you’re looking pretty well after all your wanderings, only you’re so sun-burnt, and I’m sure we’ve been in terror all the time for fear you might be catching Roman fever or something. Oh, Mr. Paston ! how d’you do. Very glad to see you, I’m sure. A medical student I think you said, my dear ?” quoth the good lady, turning to her husband, and then meandering on aimlessly, “and there ! the Jarrows haven’t arrived yet ! I do hope the dinner won’t get spoiled.”

She subsided comfortably into a chair, and began talking at Paston : persisting in her notion that that sober and successful young practitioner

was still walking the hospitals. Paston, who was a misogynist at the best of times, felt more keenly than ever that women were a futile and unnecessary section of creation. For Mrs. Dalton was one of those persons who can never keep their minds to any one subject for five consecutive minutes. Carelessly brought up herself, she had never learnt to think, and had brought up her own family about as badly as might be. Grace had escaped from her influence to a great extent by having spent much of her life at school under extremely judicious management. But the two sons, Willie and Frank, had been less fortunate. The former had been taken in charge by a good-natured cousin in Texas, and had settled down on the other side of the Atlantic to the sowing of exceedingly tame oats. But the younger, Frank, a hulking cub of about nineteen, had been thoroughly spoiled in his youth by his mother, and after a sudden and unexplained termination of his career at school, had settled down to waste his time thoroughly at a private tutor's.

While Mrs. Dalton monopolised Paston, to that worthy's exceeding discomfort, Arnold and Grace had greeted each other with much warmth.

"Well, Grace, it's a treat to see you again after all this time," said Arnold, as he took her hand.

"Thank you," she replied with a curtesy.

“But you don’t seem to have been very miserable during your absence.”

“Well, perhaps I haven’t been shedding many tears—but even the gayest of wanderers likes to see the familiar faces again. Letters are all very well; but they aren’t the real thing. Now tell me all about everything.”

So they sat down together and talked about places that Arnold had been to, and compared notes about cathedrals, and discussed landscapes for a few minutes—Mrs. Dalton’s alarm about the dinner had been quite uncalled for, as the appointed hour had not yet arrived—till they got tired of that, and came round to local matters.

“How’s old John the gardener been getting on?” inquired Arnold. “The children were over on a visit to Mrs. Marchpane this morning, and looked flourishing. That youngest kid—Tommy, the mop-headed one—looked as if he might be given to mischief. He certainly has theories about the absorption of cake—I saw him stow a great slice as big as his head. And he appreciated a penny for goodies hugely. By the way, he informed me that his principal consolation in life was ‘bulls’-eyes.’ Did you ever try a bull’s-eye?”

“Arnold, how can you! Of course not: at least not since I was ever so small—they look so

nasty and sticky. But old John's very well. He has a twinge of 'roomatiz,' as he calls it, now and then. Did I tell you about his joke?"

Arnold turned and gazed at Grace with exaggerated astonishment.

"His joke?" he said. "John's joke? Grace!"

She nodded. "Yes, it's quite true."

"Why, the world must be coming to an end! It must have hurt him badly to produce it."

"Well, he didn't seem much the worse, and perhaps he didn't mean it for a joke himself. I found him in the conservatory the other day, watering his flowers. So I thought I would ingratiate myself with him a little, and began complimenting him on his 'Gloire de Dijons.' He was pleased at that, and got quite communicative. 'Aye, aye, Miss,' he said presently: 'they allus grows well 'ere—ever sin' I bin come. Seems to me as if their wery name siggerfied 'ow grateful they wos for all I done to 'em—Glory to John! Looks most like a wot-d'y-call 'em, a patent, don't 'e?' 'A patent, John,' said I. 'Lor, Miss,' says he, 'don't ye know wot a patent be?' A light dawned on me, and I asked if he meant a *portent*. 'S'pose I does, Miss, as you says so!' was the only answer I could get out of him. He got sulky at being corrected, and curled up in his shell again."

Grace's account of the old gardener was life-like, and Arnold laughed heartily over it.

"I suppose you heard that Mr. Armitage has been made a Canon?" said Grace, when they had finished enjoying John's joke.

"A Canon? No, I hadn't heard. By Jove, I'm glad to hear that. He deserves it, certainly. I hope it won't take him from the neighbourhood."

"No," said the girl, "it's at Copesbury; he's coming here to-night."

And at that moment, the new Canon was announced. He was vicar of Burfield, and Arnold knew him well, and left Grace to shake hands with him and congratulate him on his promotion.

Armitage was a tall and somewhat imposing man; rather pale and care-worn, perhaps, for his years—he was still in the prime of manhood—but muscular, and of an easy upright carriage. Probably the slightly fatigued expression of his face was exaggerated by the fact that he shaved clean—a practice which, when indulged in by a naturally dark-haired man, is wont to add to the appearance of weariness. He was a man of wide culture, as only the best men in his profession usually are, unhappily; and Arnold had always entertained a high regard for him, heightened by an inclination to pity him as the victim of a certain obliquity of mental vision. The Canon

was a bachelor ; he was indeed one of those men whom it is hard to conceive of as anything but bachelors. The foolishest ewe in all his flock had long given up the dream that he might one day marry. Not that he entertained strong views on the subject of priestly celibacy ; but for himself, he felt that the Bride of Christ needed all his poor devotion. He had the air which is inseparably associated with parsons of high-church views ; yet he was by no means a narrow-minded man ; preferring for his own part to be strict in the matter of forms and ceremonies, but being ready to allow a larger latitude to those whose opinions did not coincide in every detail with his own. But moderation and breadth of view were not in his case at any rate the outcome of vacillation and vagueness. On the contrary, he was a man of marked firmness and clearheadedness ; and in the range of questions in which he was directly interested he had long ago made up his mind thoroughly, and was prepared to abide by his decisions.

Conversing with such a mind, Arnold naturally experienced the strong attraction of a character so unlike his own ; and it was with hearty goodwill that the two men now shook hands, when Mrs. Dalton descended upon the new arrival.

“How do you do, Canon Armitage ? There ! I’m sure you’ve been overworking yourself again.

Just look at him, Arnold ! doesn't he look dreadfully tired ? So you see we've got Arnold back again, Canon Armitage. Don't you think he's dreadfully altered ? and with a beard too ; I'm sure I wish he'd shave it off, though they do say it's a great protection to the throat in cold weather. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Jarrow"—as two ladies entered, "you remember Arnold, don't you ?" . . . and so on and so on.

Mrs. Jarrow and her daughter were neighbours, and their arrival completed the party. Dinner was announced almost immediately, and they paired off,—the Canon with the hostess, Paston with Grace Dalton.

The doctor resolved to make the best of a bad job, and lay himself out to be agreeable ; with a firm belief in his own mind that such efforts must be vain with a daughter of Mrs. Dalton's. Now, when a man has made up his mind that his companion is stupid, his conversation is not likely to be of the finest kind, however anxious he may be to try and please. He generally manages to hit on the wrong topics : and is apt to assume an air of condescension, unwittingly.

"We doctors," he remarked, "seldom get much of ladies' society ; and when we do, we like to make the most of it."

That was not a particularly happy beginning.

"Oh," said Grace, "I should have thought

you would have plenty of lady patients ; don't you ? ”

“ Well, yes : but they hardly count ; they only talk about their ailments, and that's monotonous—unless there happens to be an interesting case.”

“ Then you don't like to confine yourself to strictly professional subjects ? I wonder you find time to go in for other things.” Grace did not speak with interest ; the fact being that she wanted to hear what Arnold was saying to Miss Jarrow : an uninteresting nondescript young lady, to whom our friend was talking the barest commonplaces. Seeing that Mrs. Dalton was rattling forth volleys of very wildly aimed conversation at Armitage, Grace found considerable difficulty in attaining her desire, and very little satisfaction when she succeeded.

“ Oh yes,” said the doctor, “ we go in for a good many things.”

“ Can you talk about them ? ” said Grace mischievously. She found Paston a little dull. The doctor chuckled cheerfully.

“ A good lot of them—take the first thing to hand. Fish. Well, I own to knowing more about them out of water than in it. But there's a romance about catching them—when you can do it. How jolly to think of steaming days spent in peaceful repose by the margin of river or lake watching your float bob up and down ;

or luring the guileful trout with the yet more guileful fly! How blissful the remembrance of hours passed in scudding over the wine-dark sea trolling for mackerel, when the stormy winds do blow, having first lined your bark with well-laid sacks of sand! Or rocking gently in some sheltered bay to feel for the distant tug of plaice or sole, or to lure from his low lair the casual conger! Passing sweet—if your stomach can stand it.”

But all Paston’s grandiloquence, to say nothing of his anticlimax, seemed wasted on his companion. In fact, it may be doubted if many young ladies would have found the doctor’s discourse altogether enlivening.

“I don’t care for the sea” was all she said. Paston felt damped, and relapsed; however, Grace felt that was a little hard, and remarked that “doctors seemed very fond of the sea, at least they were always sending people to it.”

But Paston was sulky, and answered rather defiantly.

“I don’t know that we’re always over fond of our own prescriptions, Miss Dalton, any more than parsons are of their own precepts. I never could swallow a pill myself.”

The little side-hit at the cloth drew Armitage into the conversation.

"We don't profess to be very different from other people," he said with a smile.

"Extremely glad to hear it," replied the pugnacious doctor with an innocent air; "I always fancied that some preachers found their way into the pulpit by accident."

"I can't deny it altogether, I fear," said the clergyman; "at any rate, the reproach is truer of our profession than of yours. Still, we are prepared to accept the responsibility of our teaching. Pulpit utterances, I fully believe, are almost always conscientious. And though we may make mistakes, we have at least as much faith in our drugs as the other recipients."

"Dear me, Canon Armitage, what do you mean? surely you don't go about giving medicine, and goodness knows what mayn't happen! You might make ever such mistakes you know, and I'm sure I don't know what I should do if I tried."

Thus Mrs. Dalton, who had gone astray during these remarks. Paston dropped into grim silence. He did not see that, even if Armitage was right, that tended to diminish the risk of the recipients of clerical nostrums. "Doctors and parsons," he said to Arnold when they were alone afterwards, "are paid for exactly opposite reasons—we for saying what we believe, and they for believing what they say." For the time,

however, he held his tongue. For he considered Grace a failure, and to have continued his conversation with Armitage would have been a heinous offence. Talking one's own "shop" is visited as a social misdemeanour, but beside talking other people's shop it fades into insignificance. Not that these said other people resent the liberty—it gives them opportunities of discoursing with authority: the whipsters who hang on to the skirts of a profession, and the crowd of the uninformed, are the injured parties.

"Stick to your last," shriek Booby Primus and Secundus, when any one tries to desert his narrow groove in search of novelty; "no diletantism here." Booby Primus and Secundus have never had a last to stick to, and so long as they bully other people into closing their eyes deliberately to the nine hundred and ninety-nine objects of concern which are not situated vertically beneath their respective noses, and restrict their blinking attention to the thousandth which is, they can manage to do pretty well without. The method is childishly easy; all you have to do is to set the folks with one idea by the ears. These ideas being different in each case, and mutually exclusive, Booby will be hugely diverted by the consequent cross-purposes, and laugh till the tears run down his

face. Stupid silence or equally foolish talk is the grand result of this manœuvring ; every man is as good as his neighbour, and thus the reign of Boobydom is perpetuated. Modern English society has long been a prey to this levelling system, and has gradually accustomed itself to the delusion that the many-sided man is its enemy, and must be coldly discountenanced. The only weak point in the Booby intrigue is that no provision has been made for repelling the interloper when he chooses to act on the offensive. Close up, ye champions of platitude, and defend the breach, or your foes may rush in and dismantle your fortress of Dulness.

In due course Arnold's health was drunk, and every one said how glad they were to see him back again for good, and meant it too. The young fellow was a favourite among his neighbours, especially the simpler ones. The men liked him for always being on the look-out to do them little turns in an unpretending way. He did not come among them with new theories which they could not understand, or interfere with their buying and selling where and how they liked : and he possessed that tact which is above all things needful to secure influence, if it is to be real yet not tyrannical. For the women, the good souls had always taken a motherly interest in the motherless lad ; it was with

something of a sense of property in him that they had watched him grow from weakness to strength; and his better qualities were in no small degree due to their kindly sympathy. And had they been drawn to him by nothing else, he would have won their hearts by his popularity with the little ones; for he had that instinct of playfulness which would have made it no purgatory to him to have realised Boswell's notion of being shut up with an infant in a solitary castle—a state of feeling comparatively rare with young men. In short, he loved “all things both great and small”—yet, if the poet's words be true, prayer cannot be that which it is commonly taken to be: for, if prayer be the offering up of petitions, Arnold Robur did not pray.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER DINNER.

“ Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.”

Robert Browning.

GENIUS has been defined as a capacity for remaining a child though old in years. It is the thought of Wordsworth's ‘Ode’ over again; essentially modern and characteristic of this baby-worshipping age—the baby-worship being after all nothing but the old hero and ancestor-worship in a new form, since the child is father of the man. Mothers, and perhaps fathers, have probably always worshipped their own children when they have had leisure to do so; but who used ever to worship other people's? The fact is we have suddenly discovered the charm because we see in them representations of ourselves in that ancestral condition when we were kings and queens in our little world with none but a few loyal subjects and faithful friends; kings and

queens not harassed by affairs of state either, but able to let the morrow take care of itself.

William Armitage was no genius, but he had a large share of the simplicity of genius and of childhood. Born of good family, sent to a public school and thence to Oxford, he had taken orders not long after his degree. Though he had every chance of preferment, no one who knew him could have suspected him of any but the highest motives, or accused him even to themselves of that hankering after the loaves and fishes which is unfortunately so common a reason with those who enter the service of the Church at the present day. Nor did he seek advancement when once in orders. Indeed he rather avoided it, and rose more because it was his nature to rise than from any effort on his own part. His allegiance to the faith of his fathers was given in later years with the same unquestioning reverence for authority which had been taught to his childhood. His surroundings at Oxford had been of precisely the sort to foster scepticism. His friends had been intellectual men, and few such pass through the period of college life, when they are beginning to know their own powers, without feeling the necessity for religious speculation. Yet he had hardly been touched by scepticism. Nor was his belief of that form which is most nearly akin to atheism, the blind

unheeding assent of thoughtlessness and conventionality. A scholar and first-class man and a fellow of his present college, he was and had always been a religious man in the truest sense of the word. He had both the will and the power to think: and if he found the difficulties of his position less formidable than his neighbours did, it was neither by failing to grasp them nor by logically overcoming them, but by accepting them with the humility of strength. The freedom of thought and discussion in a circle of college friends had enabled him to be in sympathy with those who thought differently from himself, so that Oxford had supplied what he most wanted, and what Oxford can best supply, a spirit of religious liberality and tolerance. In short, early training had made him a churchman, and intellectual development had saved him from becoming a bigot. Without being perfect he was a clergyman of the best type that the English Church can produce. For the rest, though he was some years older than Arnold Robur, the two had long been fast friends, and their conversation was not likely to be limited to the commonplace topics of ordinary acquaintances.

Dinner passed off quietly enough that evening. Paston and Grace Dalton kept up a desultory conversation on nothing in particular, which was

really about the most edifying subject to be had. Canon Armitage and Mrs. Dalton discussed Church matters—who was to be the new Bishop, and how Mr. Smith the last curate was getting on in his living: while Mr. Dalton and Arnold talked of our hero's travels and what he had seen and done; of German music, Swiss mountains, and Italian cities. We really lose a great deal of enjoyment by the headlong way in which we take our pleasures now-a-days. The countryman who after drinking a glass of liqueur asked for “some o' that stuff in a moog” showed himself susceptible to its allurements; but his taste was not considered unexceptionable. Do we show a just appreciation of the good we can get out of men and things by scampering across the continent in a few weeks' holiday? To Mr. Dalton's somewhat old-fashioned and stay-at-home ideas, Arnold's talk of his travels, recalling as it did his own younger days when he had been something of a wanderer, remote and slow, though hardly unfriended or melancholy, was a treat such as he seldom enjoyed. And Arnold always liked a talk with the old gentleman, whose shrewd home thrusts and proverbs gave his conversation a pleasant flavour of originality.

When the ladies rose to withdraw, Arnold held the door open for them to pass.

“I hope,” he said to Grace, “you will excuse

us if we are rather late in joining you. These gentlemen are two of my greatest friends, and I want them to know each other better."

"He should have apologised to us, Miss Dalton," said Paston.

"Oh, you don't know his conceit as I do, Mr. Paston," said Grace, speaking to Paston, but smiling at Arnold. "He can't imagine people not breaking their hearts in his absence." With which Parthian shaft she passed out before he could answer in self-defence.

The gentlemen reseated themselves, the wine was passed round, and an aroma of tobacco was shortly perceptible.

"Well, Armitage," said Mr. Dalton, "hoo's a' wi' ye? You and my wife have been talking so hard I've hardly exchanged a word with you."

"Mrs. Dalton and I generally have something to say to one another, sir; we have a common ground of interest in Church matters, if in nothing else; and Mrs. Dalton is always ready to talk of them."

"Ay, let a woman begin clacking, and there's no stopping her."

"A slander! and none the truer because it's old."

"None the truer because it's old! Set him up! The world's mightily changed with you Radicals since my day. I'm a Tory, and don't

believe in Women's Rights. No. I hold with Plato—and Bartle Massey."

"And Monkbarns!" said Armitage. "Good authority certainly."

"Your modern clergyman," said Arnold, "is the worst of Radicals in everything but religion. Who are you to sneer at authority, Armitage, when your very existence is a standing confirmation of its necessity?"

"I suppose most heresies have been backed by authority—of some kind," retorted Armitage.

"Well, I must leave you to fight it out, gentlemen. I'm sorry to say I have some business which can't wait," said Mr. Dalton, looking at his watch, and withdrawing from the field and the room.

"Well, Robur," said Armitage, "you've seen a good deal since we foregathered last, I suppose. Did you get any climbing?"

"Yes, I have been rather a rolling stone," said Robur. "Oh yes! I got some climbing both in Switzerland and in the Eastern Alps—the Oetz-thaler group and the Glockner range."

"Grand work that snow-climbing, isn't it?"

"Splendid! I don't know anything finer than snow at four in the morning to walk upon. The springiest turf is nothing to it. Ice work is all very well, but for pure undiluted pleasure in the use of your limbs, give me an easy snow

slope—crisp and firm, before the sun has softened it, and not too fresh.”

“And the air by itself makes you feel twice the man. One doesn’t like to think of it in the haunts of civilisation and black coats. It makes one feel discontented with one’s lot.”

“And then the fresh morning light,” Arnold continued in his rhapsody, “and seeing the early rose-tints on the snow, and the mists sweeping up from the valleys, while you hear nothing but the rush of the rivers ever so far below ; and the clouds gathering on the peaks and sweeping along—giving you vistas ‘through the opening of cloud-curtains, through the doorways of the heaven’ of immeasurable mountain-tops ; and then veiling them over again with a fringe of glory. There’s nothing like it. But I was much more in the plains and cities than among the mountains,” he concluded, returning with a laugh to earth.

“I didn’t know you were such an enthusiast on mountains,” observed Paston.

“No more I am : except on occasion,” said Robur. “But I don’t sympathise with the Yankee who said he liked travelling in Holland best because there he could ‘smoke his cigar in his carriage, and look out of this window and out of that, and never see a bit of this damned *scenery* all the way.’ But I believe I enjoy

myself really just about as much in a town. There's plenty to see."

"Plenty!" assented Armitage. "Manners and customs, if nothing else."

"And churches and picture-galleries," said Paston. "They are the stock things, I suppose; but one gets rather tired of them, perhaps for that reason."

"I don't easily get tired of pictures," said Arnold.

"I don't see why the fact that they are the 'stock things' should make one tire of them," observed Armitage. "Why should one object to being like one's neighbours, and doing like them too?"

"That's Armitage all over," laughed Arnold. "You don't seem to have any desire for originality, Armitage. You would be quite content if every one were just like every one else. That's your ecclesiastical doctrine of Conformity and Finality over again, in another shape."

"Not exactly that," replied Armitage; "but I don't altogether believe in originality."

"No. Vide Emerson. 'Every man is a quotation from his ancestors,' &c."

"Vide Emerson, as you say. But what I mean is that I don't believe in trying to be original—in hankering after originality. If there is anything new in you, or any power of putting

what is old in a new way it will come out quite as well or better without. Originality becomes laboured and hateful when it is manifestly an object, and obviously self-conscious."

"But it has been asserted," objected Paston, "that all genius is self-conscious, and originality is surely necessary to genius."

"I don't accept the assertion," said Armitage.

"Well, but take the case of your prophets, your preachers of new gospels—your Kingsleys and Carlyles. Are they not conscious that they have something new to say?"

"Perhaps. But at any rate they do not start with the desire to say something new. If they do, they are pretty sure to be false prophets. The desire for notoriety brings people to grief oftener than not; and it is merely this desire that is at the bottom of the love of being original—even of telling a new story."

"Either to tell or hear some new thing," said Paston. "Jove; your Athenian of the first century must have been a poor sort of creature."

"The true pythoness," continued Armitage, "knows that 'prophet' means 'interpreter'—that she is inspired by a power other than her own, and at a will outside herself. She who dares unbidden to mount the tripod is an impostor and adventurer."

"But it is a wider question than that," said

Arnold, "and I don't know that your argument altogether applies. Take for instance the matter of free thought and conformity. I can't abide men who conform in religion simply because their neighbours do."

"I don't know that I—or you either probably—have much respect for men who refuse to conform just because their neighbours do conform, though."

"I don't remember any such," said Arnold. "But it surely needs no demonstration that there are plenty of men who believe—or rather profess to themselves and their neighbours that they believe, and succeed in persuading themselves and their neighbours of the fact, too—surely there are plenty of men who conform in this way simply from a desire to believe?"

"I'm afraid there are," said Armitage, "but I believe there are as many sceptics whose desire of the truth is assumed, both to themselves and others, to conceal the poverty of the true reason."

"After all, is it not a laudable desire of liberty that prompts them in any case?" said Paston.

"That's the catch-word, doubtless," said Armitage, "but any way I don't see that they gain much by it. A state of habitual scepticism must be very unhealthy, and irksome too, I think. The believer is in any case at peace with himself."

"An insecure peace," replied Paston, "and I don't grant the unhealthiness."

"I do grant the irksomeness," said Robur; "I've been a rolling stone in more ways than one, since last we met, Armitage."

"What, you haven't got over your old difficulties in your travels?" said Armitage.

"A rolling stone may not gather moss," said Paston stoutly, "but is moss the *summum bonum* of a stone after all? And your rolling stone is more likely to find a firm resting-place in the end. I'm not so sure that I wouldn't rather have my roll, and be done with it, than stay up on the cliff and think I'm fixed there for eternity, when any little bit of an earthquake may really set me going unexpectedly—or less—you don't want earthquakes: ordinary frost and rain will do as well."

"Which things are an allegory," said Arnold laughing. "I hope you don't expose yourself needlessly to the frost and rain, Armitage."

"An argument from analogy! And I don't allow its validity. Besides, 'if it comes to that, sir,' the rolling stone—or rather the stone which has rolled—is on a lower level, and has had a fall."

"So be it: it has at least firm ground to stand upon, which the other has not," said Paston.

“So much for an analogy is all I can say,” replied Armitage. “Some of your sceptics don’t seem to stop at all, though.”

“Ah! those Sisyphus-stones?” said Paston, triumphantly supporting his analogy. “They can’t stay at the bottom when they’ve got there, but must get pushed up to the top of the hill again, by some one else, observe. I don’t call that rolling. Your *mons improbus* is scarcely fair argument.”

“So much for an analogy, again I say! They have themselves to thank for their scepticism. The stone didn’t ask Sisyphus to push it up again. But these men glory in their instability. They would not have a fixed belief for worlds.”

“Mere empty-headed wind-bags! Shuttlecocks struck this way and that by the latest novelty in free thought—slaves of the *popularis aura*—weak fools who don’t want to make up their minds, for the very good reason that they haven’t any to make up. I don’t call that scepticism. They are readers of the monthlies and the weeklies—students of ephemeral literature—don’t know a good argument from a bad when they see it. They are like the unclean spirit,—walk through dry places seeking rest and finding none, because they don’t know how to look for it,” said Paston, warming to his work.

“And the last state of that man is worse than

the first," observed Arnold dryly: "we'll omit the other seven."

"No, I like a thorough sceptic," proceeded Paston, with the bit now well between his teeth: "I like a man who will examine his principles and free them from inconsistencies if he can—who hates compromises, and half measures, and heeltaps, and is not afraid of hard names. If I may use my stone-analogy once more—positively the last appearance——; have you ever noticed if you roll stones down a mountain-side how some of them are for ever pretending to stop and then rolling on a little further, pausing again, and then taking another roll? I hate that shilly-shallying, dilettante sort of method. I like the rock that goes down in huge bounds and buries itself in turf at the bottom. It doesn't always go further than the other, and it may knock off more corners—they are mere anomalies which may well be spared—but it will never remain in a precarious position."

"I fear the analogy is not so certain to land us on firm ground," said Armitage. "But to return to our shuttlecocks. I am glad to have your authority for despising them. I always find them the most disagreeable people in the world; because they are the most dogmatic, and have the least right to be so on their own principles."

“Oh yes!” said Arnold, “would that they would confine themselves consistently, like the New Academy, to the doctrine that they can know nothing—not even the fact of that very ignorance of which they assert themselves to be aware!”

“It’s all of a piece,” said Paston; “they are always pleased with each new article they read, and hold it with the utmost tenacity until it is bowled over in the next number of some other magazine. For their own oracles they have the most absurd reverence—for the *scriptum est* of their peculiar organ: and accordingly they generally end in taking orders in the English Church—if I may be pardoned for saying so.”

“Pray don’t apologise,” said Armitage, to whom the last remark was more particularly addressed. “I always think it hard that people should look upon it as a breach of etiquette to speak out the truth before a clergyman. I’m afraid that in itself is not altogether a good sign of the position of the Church just now.”

“I suppose nobody is apt to be over well pleased by home-truths as to the state of his own profession,” observed Paston.

“No, but surely a clergyman ought to be the last man to wish to shut his eyes to the facts, however unpleasant they may be.”

“It always strikes me as particularly absurd,”

said Arnold, "to hear a man come out with an oath in the presence of a clergyman and then apologise for it. It's as if he thought he ought to be on his good behaviour before the cloth—as if clergymen were to be censors over us, not sympathisers with us, to be dreaded, not confided in: it's a separation of clergy from laity, and defrauding them of their humanity, which I never can subscribe to."

"That's all very well in the abstract," said Paston. "*Homo sum* no doubt ought to be the clergyman's principle, above all men. But I can understand the feeling with many clergymen—men who have no sympathy with you; and to whose profession you feel bound to pay the respect which you often do not feel for themselves."

"But I don't see that the fact of the quondam sceptic generally ending in taking orders is at all a bad sign necessarily of the state of the Church," said Armitage. "We generally rather pride ourselves on having room for all shades of opinion in the English Church."

"Yes, but I think a good many of them aren't *quondam* sceptics—if you can call it scepticism at all," said Paston. "It's mere lip-conformity in many cases. I fancy there's a good deal of atheism among the clergy—atheism, that is, not of denial, but of indifference—atheism of the

Gallio type. One often hears of men joining the Church of Rome, when, from what one knows of their habits of thought, one may feel quite sure that it is only a cutting of the Gordian knot, an escape from doubts and difficulties which they have not the courage or the strength to face fairly. That is a kind of intellectual teetotalism which I think can only be defended in the case of habitual drunkards, whose strength of mind is destroyed by a course of uninterrupted excesses."

"But your catholicity of the English Church is gained at the expense of an illogical position," said Arnold. "It's neither one thing nor another. It pretends to be dogmatic, and requires assent to certain articles of faith—and a large section of it certainly does believe in them and require other people to believe in them too. But many men—religious men, I mean—not your lip-servants, Paston—do enter the service of the Church without assenting otherwise than verbally to the Articles. At least, if not, they use the term assent in a sense which is not only different from, but almost diametrically opposed to, the ordinary one."

"At any rate," answered Armitage, "their object is right enough; and they can see no other method of serving God in the way they want to, giving up, that is, their lives to His service, than by taking orders. Are they then

to surrender their purpose because of the difficulties of conforming, when after all their assent is understood by every one to be a mere matter of form ? ”

“ I didn’t know,” said Arnold, “ that the English Church accepted the principle of doing evil that good may come. However I don’t mind individuals holding such an opinion—they’ve got a perfect right to it. But my quarrel is not with them, but with the position of the Church, which makes it necessary.”

“ But the English Church aims at being Catholic, and any such comprehensiveness must by the nature of the case be based on compromise.”

“ That compromise is just what I object to. Look where it leads. Legal fictions are all very well. Law is a matter between man and man, and there can be no objection to your saying one thing and meaning another, provided the person to whom you say it understands what you actually do mean. But when it comes to your subscribing to what you don’t believe, in the very act of the dedication of your life to the service of the God of Truth—when that nominal assent is an integral part of the act of dedication—well, all I can say is, it doesn’t seem to me to look well for the system which makes it necessary.”

“ ‘What moderation, and understatement, and checking his thunder in mid-volley,’ ” quoted Armitage, smiling. “ But really after all it’s merely a matter between a man and his bishop. Not to mention that there are few beliefs which cannot be reconciled with the Articles.”

“ It’s rather significant,” retorted Arnold, somewhat bitterly, “ that a priest of the English Church should say so. But my dear Armitage,” he continued more quietly, “ surely you can hardly look upon all this as healthy? A man once called me a purist for holding these views. Perhaps I am : but surely the clergy, if any one, ought to be purists in such matters.”

“ And if the Articles are no test of faith,” added Paston, pertinently, “ why in the name of goodness keep out good men by retaining them ? ”

“ They’re ornamental,” said Arnold : “ relics of antiquity—serve to link the present with the past—Palladium of British Liberties with a capital L, you know, like Magna Charta and Habeas Corpus.”

“ There’s a good deal in that, though you do say it with a sneer, Robur,” said Armitage, good-humouredly. “ Not that I deny that we are much in need of some reforms in the English Church. But I think there’s a practical use in the retention of the Articles, beyond the fact

that they belong to the past and mark the Church as a historic one. They serve as a bond for rather heterogeneous materials, and hold the Church together, while they don't seriously affect its catholicity. Take away the Articles, and I am afraid the result would be a rapid disintegration."

"I rather doubt the disintegration," said Paston, "and I don't see that much good is gained by combining heterogeneous materials with what seems to me a sham bond. When people generally agreed to interpret the Articles of faith in one way, there was some point in it: but surely we have outgrown that; and I am certain that they keep out a number of good men by reason of that very conscientiousness which would otherwise make them most useful."

"Of course the whole thing is a compromise," said Armitage, "and compromise is only justified by circumstances: and as circumstances are bound to alter, compromise should always be elastic."

"Only you think," said Arnold, "that this compromise has been sufficiently elastic. Well, I don't. Look at the unity of the Church now. It is split up into wrangling and mutually hostile parties: one side can't let the others worship in their own way, but must even suborn men to create litigations—artificially produce

‘aggrieved parishioners’ to object to matters of millinery and ceremony : while the Broad Church party, who try to keep clear of both, and to be really catholic, are placed in a false position and abused by both sides.”

“But if ordinances and tests of faith were abolished,” objected Armitage, “the narrow-minded party, or rather, the party who like a narrow, sharply-defined faith, would secede.”

“I think not, if the Church were not disestablished,” said Arnold.

“Could such a reform be effected without disestablishment?” said Armitage.

“Good riddance too if they did secede,” said Paston. “They would not flourish any more than they are doing now. And the Church would be the better for having got rid of them.”

“The Church would certainly be as well able to stand without them,” said Arnold. “But as to your question, Armitage, I certainly was not contemplating disestablishment or disendowment. I think the abolition of tests—or a very great modification at least,—and perhaps—though I know you’ll object to this—the participation of the laity in Church government,—I think these two reforms could stand alone, and would do a great deal to remedy the evils which seem to me, perhaps, greater than they do to you. But

after all, you know," he concluded with a smile, "lookers on see most of the game, and I'm a looker on."

"You'll take a hand before long, I've no doubt," said Armitage, smiling in turn. "I certainly don't accept your idea of lay government, though. The Church ought to be a Theocracy, not a Democracy."

"*Vox populi vox Dei*," said Paston.

"I don't object to that principle as applied to politics," answered Armitage: "I should be very sorry to see a priest-ridden state: but when it comes to Church matters I dissent."

"And yet you stand up for Church and State," said Arnold.

"I do, so far as the preservation of a close connexion between them is concerned."

"What a lover of compromise you are, Armitage!" said Arnold. "Your views are always modified by circumstances. They never seem to be ideal."

"If they are practical I am satisfied," said Armitage; "I retort your *homo sum*. Man is by nature a political animal, and therefore a practical one, for society is based upon compromise. It is absurd to say that we are not the creatures of circumstances: so far from being able to rule them, we are fortunate if we can modify our ends to suit them."

Armitage's imperturbable good temper was one of the strongest links between him and Arnold, while Armitage was always much attracted by Arnold's earnest and sometimes enthusiastic way of attacking a question. By this time each of them knew that he could say to the other things that he could not say to any chance acquaintance: and the very divergence of their views on many topics seemed to draw them closer together, because it really indicated that the tempers of their two minds were to a great degree complementary of one another.

The conversation gradually turned from ecclesiastical to political questions, and thence to matters of general interest, the news of the day, dynamite, crofters, relations with our colonies and with foreign powers; and it was a good while before they adjourned to the drawing-room and found Grace Dalton presiding over the coffee.

"You must have been discussing something interesting all this time," she said to Paston: "something too high for the flippant feminine mind."

"By no means," said Arnold, anticipating Paston's reply: "I assure you we've been as dull as possible: only after that last remark of

yours, I thought we had better not show ourselves too soon."

"Ah! it rankled, did it?" said Grace. "Well, you've taken your revenge."

"At the expense of—well, of a taradiddle," observed Paston. "We've really had a very lively discussion."

"I assure you I've been getting badly mauled," said Armitage, cheerfully. "Won't you sing something, Miss Dalton, to remedy the depressing effects of the treatment I've been undergoing?"

Grace Dalton had a slight but pleasant voice, and sang with taste—in short her performances might be called pretty, though nothing more. Generally, however, the effect was marred by Mrs. Dalton's invariable habit of not ceasing to talk in a loud voice the whole time. On this occasion she victimised Paston, the 'medical student' as she insisted on supposing him to be, and would talk of nothing but doctors and doctoring, in a way that caused him intense agony—not only from her *gaucherie* in the treatment of the subject, but also from his own desire to listen to Grace, his wish not to be rude to Mrs. Dalton (a wish all the more powerful from her own rudeness to him), and a feeling that he was aiding and abetting, however

unwillingly, the crime of interrupting good music. Arnold tried to relieve him, but Mrs. Dalton was far too pertinacious for that to succeed. The others, however, were not much disturbed by this piece of ill-breeding, for they were accustomed to it, and for them the evening passed off pleasantly enough.

CHAPTER IV.

A COUNTRY FAMILY.

--—"A child, more than all other gifts
Brings hope with it, and forward looking thoughts,
And stirrings of inquietude, when they
By tendency of nature needs must fail."

Wordsworth.

WHEN the 'perfectly orful-looking female' exclaimed to Artemus Ward, 'You are my Affinerty!' he not unnaturally shouted, 'What upon arth is that?' And when she, incredulous of his ignorance, proceeded to ask, 'Dost thou not know'? he answered defiantly, 'No, I dostent.' Most people are like Artemus Ward in this, in spite of much good authority from Aristophanes downwards; and, however it may be, it is certain that some people come across and get attached to not their Affinities but their Antitheses; and that without always ending in a divorce-court.

Mr. Dalton was one of these unfortunate men. His partner in life was a good-hearted, comfortable woman whose absolute want of tact

and invariable way of saying the wrong thing—unless by accident—would have been most exasperating to a nervous or fastidious man; the more exasperating because there was no malice about it. Mr. Dalton was a man of considerable refinement of taste, and no one knew how keenly he felt his wife's shortcomings. His own manner among strangers was polished: in his own home-circle and among those he knew well there was a certain homeliness and freedom of expression sometimes amounting to brusqueness: but it seldom gave offence, because, as a rule, it was only used where it was understood. He was generally looked upon as a shrewd man with a will of his own, and well able to take care that he had that will. At the same time it was whispered that his wife ruled him—that, as he himself would have put it, 'the gray mare was the better horse.' This calumny, however, was due solely to the inability on the part of the calumniators to understand why he should have married such a wife, unless she made him do so. Those who knew him well, knew that he was master in his own house; and further, that although he had a will of his own he had also a soft place in his heart, which suggested a possible explanation of the situation, and in fact the true one. Few people knew that he had married Mrs. Dalton more out of pity than love, when

she was left alone in the world on the death of her mother, and when their relations had been at first entirely owing to the consequent business transactions. This fact was a key to his character. Unless he had changed a good deal since the time of his marriage, he had probably abused himself pretty soundly for his folly, and been quite aware of the defects of his intended before he married her. But he never cried over spilt milk, and whatever may have been his feelings, no word of complaint had ever betrayed them to his wife or anyone else. In the same way, in his dealings with other men his bark was always worse than his bite. He would grumble, and abuse any applicant for a favour, and himself for being such a fool as to listen to them, and end probably by doing more than was asked of him—perhaps after dismissing the applicant with a peremptory refusal. The person who knew his character best, and therefore exercised a sway over him which no one else had, was his daughter Grace, who understood how to sacrifice the shadow of authority for the sake of the substance, and therefore seldom failed to have her own way with her father.

He had been very anxious that Arnold should have a profession, and had strongly urged him before he left Cambridge to enter at one of the Inns of Court and read for the Bar. Arnold had

declined to do so at that time, saying he felt no inclination for the Bar, and that he thought of travelling for a time before settling down. Mr. Dalton took him up sharply.

“Well, well, I’ve said my say, and I wash my hands of it! He that will to Cupar maun to Cupar.” (Mr. Dalton had spent many of his early years north of the Tweed.) “Not but what you might do worse than see a little of the world before you take up a definite line, and as you’re a man of independent means there’s no hurry. But money or no money, a man’s got no right to fool away his time doing nothing. ‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do,’ Arnold Robur!” (He was very fond of using both Christian and surname in apostrophe, especially in the course of an admonition.) “However, you must do as you please—it’s neither beef nor brose o’ mine, and I’ve told you what I think.”

Arnold had done as he pleased, but had not felt much the better for it—had not, that is, realised how much the better he was for it. As yet he felt only that things were a good deal changed. Mr. Dalton’s grumbling good-nature, his proverbs and Scotticisms, Mrs. Dalton’s vacant vulgarity and want of any qualities with which he was in sympathy, were all the same as ever; yet, though he felt them to be the

same, he felt that they were changed for him. His guardian's house was no longer the home that it had once been for him. Nor was it the change in Grace, though that was a part of it. He had left her not much more than a school-girl. She was certainly not a schoolgirl now, and yet he somehow felt as if his relation to her was less changed than anything else about the place.

Grace Dalton was pretty, and when that has been said there is not much left. Her education had been of the Pre-Girtonite type, which aimed principally at prettiness. She inherited her father's taste, and being a girl of average wits could do most things as she was expected to do them. She danced well, had a sweet but not powerful voice ; sang 'nicely' as the ladies say ; played correctly, but without any particular brilliancy ; drew and painted as her masters had taught her, but without much power or artistic feeling ; dressed and moved gracefully ; spoke French and German fairly ; and talked commonplace by the hour pleasantly enough. If the 'higher' education of women is apt too often to produce gargoyles, the 'lower' (if it may be called so for the sake of antithesis) in many—nay, in most—cases produced wax-dolls. Not that Grace was a wax-doll—by no manner of means : but she would have been but for a

certain amount of spirit which made her something more than a mass of accomplishments.

“Papa,” she said, as she handed Mr. Dalton his coffee next morning—Mrs. Dalton considered punctuality to be the thief of time, and therefore her daughter generally presided at the breakfast-table—“what time will Frank be coming to-day?”

“I don’t know what time he’s coming,” replied Mr. Dalton. “I should like to know what business that same lazy young vagabond of a brother of yours has to be coming home at all just now. He ought to be hard at work like his betters.”

“You wouldn’t be so unnatural as to check his desire for the delights of home, would you, papa?” said Grace, smiling rather maliciously.

“Delights of home, quo’ she!” exclaimed her father, apostrophising his poached egg. “Delights of pure idleness, you mean. Home indeed! It’s nothing more or less than sheer and absolute laziness on his part.”

It was perfectly true. Mr. Dalton’s bitterest words usually were; a fact which did not lessen their sting. He often saw and stated the truth, when his actions did not seem to show any discernment of it. It would have been better for Frank, and sometimes for other people, had he always acted on his rather keen insight.

“He’s but a feckless ne’er-do-weel, that brother

of yours—" he continued, "an idle, good-for-nothing young goose that hasn't got two ideas in his head. I wish you and he would lay your two apologies for heads together and devise something for him to do, though how you're to get anything out of brains that haven't got anything in them,—Lord knows! And what the use is of a young fellow that won't make up his mind to anything, I don't see."

"I thought you had 'made up your mind' to let him go in for the army, as he wanted to," said Grace demurely.

"Wanted to! aye, wanted! I wonder how long he'll want to! You'll do all you can to keep him to it, though. Trust a woman for that. They're like turkey-cocks and bulls—all alike if you wave a red rag."

"Somebody said the other day that a good uniform was the best recruiting-sergeant," said Grace: "I believe men are every bit as bad as we are, papa."

"Fiddlestick! It's only because it pleases the womankind," retorted Mr. Dalton. "But as to Frank, I've no mortal objection to his going into the army, if he'll only take the trouble to pass. But I don't see the use of my keeping him on my hands and teaching him all sorts of things which are of no possible use to any one except for passing into Sandhurst, if he's going to get

ploughed and have to take up something else, and begin again at the beginning."

"Oh! papa, I'm sure Frank will pass; besides you said yourself the other day that no one but a born fool could help passing into Sandhurst."

"And what's your brother Frank but a born fool and idiot?" responded Mr. Dalton genially. "However, I suppose you're right: we'll see, though. Needs must, when the d—ahem!—woman drives."

Mr. Dalton knew something of his son's character, and the circumstances under which Frank's school career had been cut short had not altered his opinion for the better. He was unsparing as far as words went, though he did his duty and more than his duty by the boy. But hard words do far more than unkindness in action to alienate affection, and Frank, who was incapable of looking into what underlay his father's manner, had quite lost touch of him; so that they had none of the good understanding that existed between Mr. Dalton and Grace.

"You don't know what time he's coming then, papa?" Grace asked again.

"Oh! I suppose he'll be here to lunch. He's pretty sure to come as soon as he can in the day. By the way, do you know anything of Arnold Robur's movements?"

“He told Mr. Armitage he would go with him to Copesbury to-day, I think.”

“Ay, he did say so—now you mention it, I admit that he did say he was going down there. And then he’s going off to ‘somewhere or other’ on the seaside to ‘recruit’ after his travels, save the mark! Why can’t he recruit here, I should like to know?”

“Doctor’s orders, I suppose,” said Grace.

“Oh yes! Paston, I suppose. He’s a well-set-up chap, that, too. But it’s mere love of moving about. He’ll take a lot of settling down. He’s a regular gad-about. It’s one thing to set yourself going, and another thing, and a very different thing, to stop yourself when once you’re started. It’s easier to raise the devil than to lay him by a long way.”

“‘Chalks,’ as Frank would say,” observed Grace laughing. “But I should think Arnold would find it rather slow at Oakleigh by himself. He’s not going to the seaside immediately?”

“I don’t know how soon he’s going,” said Mr. Dalton. “Yes, I daresay he will find it a bit lonesome in that big house of his all by himself. But for that matter he must pickle in his ain pock-neuk, and just make the best of it he can. He’ll be bringing home a wife to his ingle one of these days, I daresay. And any way there’s plenty of work to be done in the world, and so

long as you've got your hands full, you're not likely to feel lonely."

Grace laughed, not very heartily. "I can't imagine Arnold as a married man," she said. The notion did not strike her as an attractive one.

"But," she continued pertinaciously, "it's all very well to talk of work, but how is he going to get it to do?"

"Oh! so long as a man's got his wits about him and the proper use of his arms and legs, he'll have no difficulty in getting work to do, if only he'll set himself to it. There's none so deaf as those who won't hear; and when a man says he can't get work, you may be pretty sure it means that he's too idle to take it."

Mr. Dalton always liked to establish his statements on universal rules, but his generalisations were apt to be rather hasty in consequence. His prophecy as to his son's movements however turned out to be well-founded. Frank turned up before lunch.

He was a big awkward lad of about nineteen, with the manners and appearance, but for his size, of a lower-school boy. If Grace had inherited her father's qualities rather than her mother's, her brother had reversed the operation to some extent—though it would be scarcely fair to Mrs. Dalton to say that Frank was his 'mother's son.'

Still, he was a very good instance of the failure of early home education. His natural good qualities, whatever they may have been, had remained undeveloped under the care of a mother who knew nothing of boys, and was totally wanting in insight. He had grown up an ignoramus with no strength of character and none of those sterling principles which are generally supposed to be acquired in the bosom of one's family rather than in the trials and struggles of life among other boys at a public school. Had he enjoyed more of his father's care and less of his mother's, the case might have been different. But women are unfortunately supposed to be fitted by nature to educate, and able to dispense with any special training, while men are expected to do nothing more than support their families; and it is hardly surprising that Mr. Dalton should have seen but little of his son's life before he went to school. The consequence was that at school Frank was a failure: he remained in a low form, an incorrigible idler, both in work and games, distinguished for nothing among his fellows, unless it be that his superior weight and strength enabled him successfully to bully the small boys of his form. Friends he had none: parasites one or two, destined, alas! to follow in his footsteps unless some guardian angel intervened: and a few associates of the same stamp

as himself. These kindred spirits generally band together, whether it is merely because like seeks like, or because no one else will associate with them, or because there is a certain mutual advantage in the combination, and by knowing one's neighbour's failings one becomes less alive to one's own: certainly it is not from any feeling which can be called friendship, for the slightest strain is sufficient to snap the tie. It may be true enough and just enough to talk of 'happy boyhood': but a lower-school form is sometimes a veritable pandemonium—and no reproach to prefects either, valuable as their good example may be, for they are, and must be in the nature of things, in a different sphere: Epicurean gods living apart in blest abodes a careless life, and knowing nought of the joys and sorrows of mortals—in the Lower Third.

But to return to Frank: after spending some two years at school, in favour with neither men, gods, nor masters, he retired against his will, prematurely and abruptly, into private life. His place knew him no more, and probably the ignorance was found to be bliss. Since that time he had been at a tutor's, where the best thing he learnt was how to smoke. A boy who leaves school early and is sent to a tutor seldom improves there. His habits may change, and he may acquire some small—usually very small—

amount of useless information, but the tone of his mind is not apt to be altered for the better. Frank was by nature undeniably stupid, and neither early education nor the cribbing and copying and shirking of his school life had improved his faculties, so that it was not to be expected that the relaxed discipline of a private tutor's establishment would suit him for learning.

His mother had always petted and spoiled him from his earliest days upward, and now reaped the usual reward of such conduct in his entire indifference towards her affection: though this perhaps wounded her less than it might have wounded some people. With his father he was at cross-purposes, and his behaviour to him was apt to be rude or at least sullen, as if in enforced obedience to a master he feared but did not love. To Grace alone he showed a sort of canine affection—or rather feline, for it was not altogether to be relied upon—outside his usual selfishness. But neither to her nor to any one else was he otherwise than reticent as to his private proceedings. Perhaps, however, they were not of sufficient interest even to himself to justify his inflicting them on his neighbours.

He came in and tolerated the embraces of his mother and sister with all a schoolboy's assumption of *ennui* at a customary but superfluous ceremony. At lunch Mr. Dalton asked him

what his tutor thought of his chance of passing his 'preliminary' for Sandhurst—for it was not of much use to think of the further examination yet.

"Oh! I don't know," he replied with a drawl which was only not affected because the non-chalance which it denoted had become a second nature to him. "You see they're so confoundedly hard on a fellow—plough nearly every one who goes in."

"No wonder, seeing that they get half the gowks in the kingdom," said his father. "But what business has anybody to get ploughed in subjects he ought to have known by the time he was ten years old, I should like to know?"

"Oh! the subjects aren't so stiff," answered Frank. "But they floor you for the slightest thing. Three mistakes in English dictation, you know."

"And 'fat the deil' is a man fit to do in this blessed world of Board-schools and Education Acts if he can't write a piece of the Queen's English without making mistakes in it? You must have your bread buttered for you, my young man, before you can afford to luxuriate in ignorance in that sort of way," said Mr. Dalton: "although" (this word he was in the habit of saying slowly, pronouncing the 'th' as in the word 'thick') "although for that matter it's not

every one that has his bread buttered that is in a position to dispense with the use of the three R's."

"That's all very well," muttered Frank sulkily. "I'd like to see some people try their hand at dictation, though they do think they know such a lot about everything." Frank, like most dunces, was apt to be sceptical, especially when nettled, of a degree of knowledge which was outside his experience and comprehension.

"It's very hard, I do think," said Mrs. Dalton, not unconscious of certain failings of her own. "They ought not to be so strict with young men just leaving school."

"When they can't be expected," observed Mr. Dalton, sarcastically, "to have learnt how to write, spell, and cipher. However, we must take things as we find them; the ordeal has to be undergone, I suppose, and we must make the best of it we can."

Frank had become sullen, and at the best of times he did not shine much in conversation. On this occasion Mr. Dalton monopolised the talk and lectured his son freely.

"And if you're not going to pass into the army, what is it your gracious will and pleasure to do with your highness's most noble self?" he continued. "I suppose if you can't make up your mind to work for one thing you're not likely to

make up your mind to work for another. But let me tell you you can't make a plack a bawbee by sitting still and expecting it to grow in your pocket, nor can you earn your livelihood with doing nothing; so you'd just better give over sitting glowering there like a wild cat out of an ivy-tod, and set yourself thinking what you're going to turn your hand to."

Frank grumbled something about it being "a mighty lot of use to talk in that way, when he'd been grinding like a nigger for the last six months."

"Yes, and a mighty lot of use it is, too, my paying Mr. Johnson your tutor Lord knows how much a year to coach you for Sandhurst, if you're going to fail after all. What use will all the thousand and one things they expect you to know at Sandhurst be to you—"

"Reading, writing, and ciphering," observed Grace in a malicious parenthesis.

"Upon my word!" said her father, turning upon her and screwing up his eyes—a gesture which he very commonly used when bandying words, especially with Grace. It made him look short-sighted, which he actually was not, and also added much the same intimidating air of close inspection which some young men assume by mounting a single eyeglass, and some old men by looking over the rims of their spectacles.

“Hark at her!” he continued severely, “just hark at her! And who gave you leave, Miss, to put in your opinion before it was asked for? The airs the rising generation give themselves—! Set her up! Much difficulty there would be in passing into the army if you could do it with reading, writing, and arithmetic.”

Grace did not retort by quoting her father's disrespectful dictum as to the ease of the examination in question. She smiled a self-satisfied smile at the rebuke she had aimed at and attained, was silent and ‘thought the more,’ perhaps: and presently led the conversation into a pleasanter channel for her brother. Frank however was out of humour and took little or no part in it; though for that matter he never found the talk at home of a sufficiently congenial character to make him otherwise than indifferent to it. Indeed it may be doubted whether he took a very lively interest in any conversation at all, unless it were concerned with dogs and horses. At home his manner was always constrained and listless, especially in his father's presence.

After lunch Grace went out into the garden to enjoy the afternoon sunshine. Frank followed her, and after walking by her side silently for some time, meditating whether he should indulge in a quiet smoke, took her to task somewhat gruffly.

“I see you've been at the gov'nor about

letting me shoot at Sandhurst, Grace," he said, not very cheerfully.

"We were talking about it," said Grace. "I thought you were so anxious to try."

"Oh ! it's such a confounded grind, you know. Old Johnson's always expecting a fellow to be smuggling at those beastly books all day. And as for teaching you anything, he might as well try to fly. I call it beastly rot."

"In fact, a coach ought to put everything you want to learn into your head without any trouble on your part, eh ?" said Grace with a laugh.

This was precisely Frank's view, though he did not own it. Moreover he could hardly be expected to make due allowance for the quality of the material on which Mr. Johnson had to work, in estimating that gentleman's teaching powers.

"And then the gov'nor always cuts up rough," he continued, disregarding Grace's remark. "It's nothing but nag, nag, nag from morning to night when I'm here. I swear it's enough to make a fellow cut the whole concern and emigrate, or something or other."

The vagueness of this last remark was characteristic of Frank's views on all questions of action. He always found it very hard to have to make up his mind to do anything, and invariably put off decision to the last moment. Grace wondered to herself whether he thought he could

live at ease in the colonies without doing any work, or whether like some political economists he merely looked upon 'emigration' as a sort of mysterious panacea for all human ills. However, she was concerned less to examine his state of mind just now than to pour oil on the troubled waters: for the relation between him and his father was very unpleasant to her.

"It's very absurd of you, Frank," she said severely. "You know papa doesn't mean half he says, and he wouldn't talk at you in the way he does if you only took it a little more good-humouredly. One would suppose from the way you treat it all *au grand sérieux* that he was really severe, instead of giving you all the chances he has."

"Well, I wish he wouldn't jaw so," grumbled Frank: "it's enough to make a cat sick the way he keeps on at it from morning to night."

"Come now, you know that's all nonsense, Frank. It's only his way. He doesn't mean it; and besides it is rather annoying to find you throwing up everything, and refusing to set fairly to work and do your best."

"I like that! when I've been grinding like the deuce for ever so long, to be told I won't do any work," rejoined Frank.

"You don't look so very much worn out after it all," she said. "And what's the use if

nothing's to come of it? If only you'd try and do something—but you can't expect papa to keep you forever, you know. You must make your own bread sooner or later, and he's given you every chance of earning a living."

"Hang it all, the guv'nor's got plenty of cash!" said Frank. "I don't see why I need work as if I was the son of a ploughman! I suppose I shall always have enough tin to keep me going, if that's all; and where's the use of bothering so?"

"Why, Frank, it's absurd of you to talk as if you didn't know you must make your own way. What's the use of being a man if you're to be dependent on your father all your life? You're lucky enough in having such a good chance of a start as it is."

"I swear you're as bad as the guv'nor himself for jawing a fellow, Grace," said Frank. "I don't see why you can't let me alone. You're always pitching into me."

The two strolled on in silence for a time, Grace disappointed, and both of them rather nettled. Frank could not for the life of him understand what was the use of working if you had a chance of being idle. The deification of labour was beyond his comprehension, though Mr. Dalton lost no opportunity of impressing its excellence on him. It is unfortunately too often stated with all the authority of the pulpit

that the necessity of labour came into the world with sin at the Fall. To preach that work is a necessary evil, instead of a boon given by God to men, is to recommend the life of the Point in 'Flatland,' absorbed in eternal beatitude of self-thought, where self is nothing. But too many of us take this jaundiced view of things, and Frank was one of these. Perhaps it would have been better for him if he had actually been the son of a ploughman.

"I tell you what it is," said Frank with sudden energy, "I'm going to cut this Sandhurst business. It isn't good enough by half. It's a confounded deal too much sweat. I don't care what I do, but I'm going to cut that."

"Now don't, Frank," pleaded Grace: "do be reasonable and stick to it. You know it'll annoy papa so. Besides, what'll you do instead?"

"I don't care," said Frank sullenly. "It's no go. I'm sick of this eternal grind; and besides, I shan't pass anyhow. The guv'nor must just make the best of it."

"It's very unfair to him too," said Grace. "It wasn't his fault you left school: and now you're throwing this up."

"I don't see why you need rake up all a fellow's old misfortunes," said Frank, with an injured air. "It's beastly rough to have that thrown at my head after all this time."

"If you kept it in mind," said Grace sadly, "I shouldn't have to remind you of it." Grace knew, and felt as Frank certainly never felt it, how he had left school, though she never knew what his offence was.

Mr. Dalton, however, did not receive Frank's announcement of his views as ill as Grace had expected, for he had had very little faith in his son's strength of purpose, and less in his ability to pass.

"Well, well; what must be must be. I suppose if you don't choose you won't. One man may lead a horse to water, but twenty can't make him drink. Though what the deil you're going to do with yourself is more than I can say."

However, he determined that Frank should not go back to his tutor. "If you're to eat the bread of idleness anywhere, my young friend, you'd better eat it here. You can do nothing just as well here as there, and I shan't be paying for the privilege all the time; and as you don't learn anything from our friend Mr. Johnson, there's no reason in life why he should be pretending to teach you. Doubtless 'there's sma' sorrow at your parting, as the auld mear said to the broken cart.'"

Frank's very limited library was accordingly sent for, and he remained at Beau Séjour.

CHAPTER V.

HERACLEITUS AND DEMOCRITUS.

“If a company works a steam fire-engine, the firemen needn’t be straining themselves all day to squirt over the top of the flagstaff. Let them wash some of those lower-story windows a little.”—*The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table.*

MRS. MARCHPANE was seated under the old mulberry tree at the end of the grass walk, surrounded by a clucking crowd of citizens from the miniature hamlet of fowl-houses and hen-coops close by. With a big ball of grey wool and a shapeless mass of substantial knitting on her lap, she looked like a sort of Minerva in homespun, a comfortable personification of housewifery. At present, however, the click of her needles was silent, as she sat contemplating the ridiculous movements of the fowls as they poked and pecked about her. “My chicks,” she said, “how happy you look. You don’t trouble yourselves with other people’s business—or your own either, if you can only get enough to eat.” But here her meditations were interrupted by a slow foot-step on the grass, and she began busily knitting

again, as she looked up and murmured, "Here's Joshua Gibbins, with a face as long as my arm."

Mr. Gibbins was the bailiff of the Oakleigh estate. But he was by no means the jovial personage one naturally expects such a functionary to be in the pages of orthodox and legitimate fiction. On the contrary, remarkable and unpromising as the fact may appear, it is certain that he wore habitually an appearance of excessive dejection. Not that he was morose; far from it. Indeed, to say that he was constitutionally mild would give but a faint idea of his sunless serenity. But his whole demeanour was tinged with melancholy. Guiltless of thought or erudition, his mental attitude was unmistakably morbid. His nature was like one of those winter days with which we are unhappily too familiar in this country—days of thaw, unpleasantly moist and muddy, but calm. In short he was a gentle unbeliever in the possibility of happiness, a placid pessimist.

At the sight of this philosopher's advancing figure, Mrs. Marchpane's mirth, of which a vast store had been accumulating within her ever since Arnold's arrival, and now stood sadly in need of a safety-valve, suddenly made its escape in a voluminous rush of laughter. Gibbins stood dumb-founded. It was as bad as if he had found himself at Constantinople and been

commanded by the Sultan to dance a hornpipe or be bow-strung on the spot. Such a triumphant vindication of the existence of happiness it had never been his fortune to meet with before, and he was proportionately astounded by the experience.

The worthy dame, however, soon recovered her self-command.

“Oh dear, dear! But it’s very bad manners of me to laugh straight out in your face like that, Joshua,” she said, checking her merriment: “and you don’t seem very likely to do the same by me either. But you mustn’t be hard on me!” Here the idea of his laughing at anything almost set her off again. “You see,” she went on, “it’s as if old times had come back, now there’s a Robur again at Oakleigh, and it makes me feel so young, the least thing’s enough to turn my head.”

Mrs. Marchpane might have taken her companion’s silence as *carte blanche* to indulge her present vein still further, had not her eye been arrested by something unusual in his manner. He had been regarding her absently while she was speaking, and when she ceased his outer man began to heave and jolt in a strange and uncomfortable manner, while something like the ghost of a mournful chuckle seemed to struggle vainly for an exit. Never was merriment more rapidly

extinguished than Mrs. Marchpane's at this portent. Could she believe her senses? And was it really Joshua who was thus displaying symptoms of the lighter emotions? Mental arithmetic was not her forte, but a tolerable calculation of the time it would take her to traverse twice over the distance between the grass walk and the cupboard where she kept her infallible draughts and doses figured itself out in her brain with unusual celerity. The perturbed spirit inside Mr. Gibbins' waistcoat was, however, soon laid, and a cloud of deep humiliation settled upon his brow. Glancing with some trepidation over his shoulder, and manifestly relieved at finding that his momentary relapse from principle had passed unnoticed even by the cocks and hens, he stammered awkwardly,

"Best let bygones be bygones, mum, as you say. Thinks ha' bin a trifle out o' gear lately, and it do putt us off our balance a bit. But arter all," he added with a sigh, looking away from Mrs. Marchpane, and apparently addressing a promising young rooster which was flapping its wings near his feet, "arter all there is a brighter side; there allus is, you know."

"It doesn't seem to cheer you up much, anyhow," responded the housekeeper. "I believe you've really forgotten how to laugh."

The lugubrious Gibbins sadly acquiesced.

"It's as true as corduroy, mum," said he. "I'm not denyin' as I ain't ekal to a good cry; but larfin's more'n I can manage. I ain't used to it, there's where it is, and it's beyond me. But then it's all there, mum" (patting his breast with an air of modest conviction), "like a stone at the bottom of a well, if it could only find a went."

"I suppose you can't help it, Joshua," said Mrs. Marchpane, going on with her work; "but if you could, I shouldn't think any the more of you for not being a little more cheerful."

"You may rest upon me, Mrs. Marchpane, that I'm serus through no fault of my own, mum. There's no such backin' out of a good think in me, and I'd be willing enough, bless yer 'eart, to enjoy life like most folks, if I could. But what's the use o' callin' out about it when the thing's 'ard enough to bear without tantrums and torches."

As a plausible gloss upon this last word it may be suggested that Mr. Gibbins meant *tortures*.

Mrs. Marchpane's interest in psychological phenomena, or her feminine curiosity, was quickened by the bailiff's uncommunicativeness.

"Well, if your low spirits aren't your own fault, what are they from, do you think?" she enquired. "You take your meals regular, don't you, Joshua?"

But the sufferer still maintained his reserve with doleful tenacity, despite the flattering solicitude implied in these queries.

“ ’Tain’t that neither,” he rejoined. “ Maybe it runs in the fambly, like old chaney. Leastways father and mother were both serus, being pecooliar Baptises; and now, let me hold with Church-goin’ ever so, I’m obleeged to b’long to their way o’ thinkin’. Sounds ’ard on a man. But there, I reckon the arrangement’s handy, and saves trouble. Prov’dence would hev its hands full if it was to go purvidin’ a sep’rate lot of religious voos for every boy or gal that’s born into the world. A man has got to stick to what his fambly has allus held by, I take it; and not go sniffin’ out cracks in the old roof on his own account, and stuffin’ ’em up with any green straw what lays convenient.”

“ Take care, Joshua;” and Mrs. Marchpane shook her finger at him with a grave face. “ Don’t you be talking about what Providence can do, and what it can’t. Church-folks and Baptists may differ about a good many things, but I know who is the best judge of what’s good for us all, whatever we choose to call ourselves. Sparrows or Christians, it’s all one, Joshua.”

“ Well, if Prov’dence looks arter sparrows as well as you tend these ’ere chicks, Mrs. Marchpane, they must have a precious good time of it

surely. Only it do seem to me that the things is allus a-'ungerin' for suthin' to eat in winter. P'raps they don't know when they've had enough, though. Jest see that fat little chap a-peckin' at the scraps you've thrown down there for our tame 'uns. I've never set eyes yet on sich stuff chucked down anywheres for them; and it's pretty plain as they likes it, too."

But Mrs. Marchpane was not to be baffled by such sophistry.

"Greedy little thing," she cried, shoohing, to scare off the marauder. "There are always thieves, Joshua, who are not content with what they've got themselves, but must take a bite now and then from other people's pudding. You've no call to trouble your head about those rascally sparrows. They can attend to themselves well enough. Sparrows indeed! With my beautiful chickabiddies which have got to live honestly, and die as they're wanted, it's different."

To say that Gibbins looked depressed at Mrs. Marchpane's treatment of his speculations would be unnecessary, as depression was his normal condition. But he seemed rather sadder than before. He and Mrs. Marchpane often waged wordy warfare, though they were very good friends and staunch adherents of the house. Mrs. Marchpane was never tired of rebuking his gloomy way of

looking at things, and though her raillery cannot be said to have had an exhilarating influence on him, it would not be safe to infer that he did not enjoy it after his own manner.

“Seems like as if they was bound to get it took out of ’em at one end if they don’t at t’other,” he said ruefully. “If they do get looked arter that way, they won’t last so long, and there’s no knowin’ when you’ll be wantin’ one of ’em for the kitchen.”

“Well I never did see a man like you for smelling out the bad side of a thing, Joshua Gibbins,” said Mrs. Marchpane severely. “But you’d better be off with your croakings, for Mr. Arnold’s sure to want to see you this morning before he goes away. Mind, now, you don’t keep him too long with your business.”

“You may rest upon me, mum,” said the bailiff, “all I got to say won’t take—not more nor five minutes, Mrs. Marchpane. Though ’tain’t too pleasant neither. If the master will get a-cuttin’ down o’ them rents, he won’t be gettin’ any in at all afore long. It’s allus the way. Give ’em a inch and they’ll take a ell.”

With these prognostications, which had their basis solely in his own pessimism, Gibbins retired to the house to hold his interview with Arnold, whom he found in the library ; he was standing by the fireplace with a book in his

hand, not reading it, but gazing abstractedly upon the shelves opposite. They dispatched their business speedily.

“By the bye, Gibbins,” observed the master when they had finished, and the bailiff was lingering with his hand on the door-handle: “do you know anything about these books?”

“Me, sir? No,” replied Gibbins in a voice that suggested that he was ashamed of the fact—which he was not. “It isn’t the likes o’ me that has the time to be lookin’ at the insides o’ books—leastways printed books, sir!” he added, regretfully recollecting that he was not altogether without booklore of a sort.

“I didn’t mean to accuse you of looking at their insides,” said Arnold with a smile. The bailiff’s solemnity always tickled him, and the idea of his studying the contents of the Oakleigh library was altogether too much for his gravity. “But do you know at all what there is here? is there any catalogue or list?”

“Not as I knows on, sir,” said Gibbins, “and I don’t ’speck them books is as good as they was. Though there’s nobody ever touches them except when Mrs. Marchpane is by, and then it’s only to dust them. But you can’t ’spect books to keep right when there’s nobody as reads ’em or understands about ’em to look arter ’em.

'Tisn't in nature. I don't think as any of 'em's lost, sir ; but as to a list, no, I don't know on any."

"They seem to be in very good preservation," said Arnold ; "they're well dusted and the room appears to have been kept warm and dry. And I don't suppose any of them are lost. It wasn't that. Only one likes to know what one has and what one hasn't."

The bailiff slightly shook his head. This feeling was beyond him. Books were books, and one seemed to him pretty nearly as good as another. They were mostly better not read, he thought ; but if you must read them what was the odds ?

"I wonder if Mrs. Marchpane would know," said Arnold : "would you ask her to step this way ?"

But as Gibbins proceeded to do so, Robur looked out of the window and saw the direction he took. "Oh ! she's out there," he said to himself, and went out after the bailiff. The latter had reached Mrs. Marchpane, and was observing :—"Mr. Arnold wants to speak to you, Mrs. Marchpane, mum. He's in the libery, and he wants to know summat about them books. He's axin' arter a cattle-og or summat."

Mrs. Marchpane had picked herself and her work up with a view to obeying the summons,

when she saw Arnold coming quickly down the grass walk, and dropped a curtsey to him.

“Don’t move, Barbara,” he said, “sit down again. I only want to know whether there is any catalogue of the books in the library here. It’s all very well when one’s familiar with all the books and has arranged them oneself: but to introduce yourself to a large number of books with no list to guide you is rather difficult.”

“I don’t know of any, sir; your father knew them every one, and never wanted a list for them, not he. They’re just as he left them, sir, all just the same. If he came back to-morrow he could lay his hand on any of them. But I don’t think there was ever a list.”

“Well, I must make one,—or get one made. I’m going away to Copesbury to-day, Barbara. It must wait till I’m back for good, I suppose. Then I’m going to London and down to the sea-side for a bit.” He sighed. “It’s very pleasant coming home again after you’ve been travelling all over the world.”

“Surely,” said Mrs. Marchpane; “but why should people want to be always running about? Begging your pardon, Mr. Arnold, wouldn’t it be better to stay at home a bit? To be sure it’s a bit lonesome, but after all a body can always be doing something. At least, the likes of me can: but I dare say it’s different.”

“One can’t always do what one wants to, you see ; and then if one once gets into the way of moving about, it’s not so easy to settle down. There’s a *vis inertiae* to be overcome in stopping motion as much as in starting it, you know,” said Arnold, who liked to note the effect on Gibbins of language he didn’t understand. “Besides,” he proceeded with a laugh, “if one didn’t go away, there wouldn’t be the pleasure of coming back.”

“There is allus a brighter side o’ things,” observed, or rather soliloquised Gibbins, for the remark was not intended for the general public so much as for himself. “Seems as a man can’t get at any pleasure nohow without doin’ hisself a injury fust. A man don’t so much as eat without he’s hungry first—leastways not unless he’s greedy and can go on a-eatin’ all day and all night and never know when he’s had enough, like them sparrers.”

Gibbins’s morbid view of phenomena was so thoroughly genuine and constitutional that he really could hardly tell what he considered pleasant and what painful. Hence in his remarkable theory of the ‘brighter side o’ things’ the aspect which he appeared to consider consolatory would have had by no means a cheering effect on the majority of his fellow-men.

“True, O philosopher ! Plato said the same

thing long ago," observed Arnold. "That's why you and I, Gibbins, cultivate the unpleasant side of things, just that we may get the pleasant. And we get it too, whatever you may think, Barbara."

"I'm sure it's not my fault," said Gibbins deprecatingly; "I allus does my best to enjoy life, but somehow it won't come. I do think now and agin as there ain't nothink but dust an' hashes in the world arter all," he concluded despondently.

"Exactly: we pitch our lives in a minor key on system;" (Gibbins seemed doubtful of the accuracy of this description, but made no answer.) "Blessed are they that expect nothing: they shall never be disappointed."

Mrs. Marchpane had been looking anxiously from one to the other, and now shook her head uneasily, and knitted rather faster than usual. Knitting is a useful safety-valve for getting rid of superfluous emotion.

"I don't hold with them that are always picking holes in things—poking and prying to find out faults, and just as discontented when they don't find any as when they do," she said. "Why can't they let them alone and take them as they come? They'll be finding fault with Providence, and saying they could do things a great deal better. If they'd just make the best

of things as they find them there's plenty of good to be got out of them. People have got enough to make them unhappy without looking for it, and they've got plenty to enjoy too, if they'd only enjoy it, instead of making their lives a burden to everybody with fault-finding. It's enough to spoil all one's pleasure to hear you, Joshua. And you, Mr. Arnold, that ought to know better, and that has everything round you to make you happy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to go encouraging him, and pretending to be so miserable too." Little Mrs. Marchpane's feelings were too much for her, and made her speak to Arnold in a way so like the old days of his childhood that it pleased him excessively, apart from the humour of the situation.

"*Quod de sapientibus alter ridebat*—" he murmured to himself. "Bravo, Barbara. I didn't mean to displease you, Barbara, indeed I didn't," he continued aloud. Then the comicality of this storm in a teapot struck him forcibly, and he said with a laugh: "But I must get you and Gibbins here to fight it out. It would be as good as a play."

Gibbins shook his head dolorously, whether from mere downheartedness, or as wishing to signify that he and Mrs. Marchpane too often fought it out, and always against his will, it would be hard to say.

But Mrs. Marchpane was not to be appeased. "It's all very well to talk, Mr. Arnold, but I don't see what you want to be making things out worse than they are for. And if you'd only set yourself down and be happy like your neighbours, what is there to hinder you?"

"Come now, Barbara, you'll make me unhappy in earnest if you're so cross," said Arnold playfully. "I didn't mean to vex you, you know. I was only playing at being unhappy, after all. However I must be off if I'm to catch my train to Copesbury," he concluded, looking at his watch and retiring precipitately to the house.

In another half-hour he was on his way to join Armitage, who had been obliged to go down by an earlier train. He mused as he lay back in the carriage on the last two or three days. Was Paston, whom he had sent off to town that morning in his usual high spirits to renew the struggle with disease and distress—was Paston right in his view of the case? Or was he, Arnold Robur, 'playing at being unhappy' as he had said jestingly in the language of past days to Mrs. Marchpane? Was it a morbid and dangerous condition of mind which he could and ought to shake off with a strong effort? or was it but a stage in his mental development—'Blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised'? So he pondered till he reached

Copesbury and the inner man had to give place to the outer.

Armitage was out, and had left a message that he could not be in till some time later. So Arnold determined to stroll about the place and see what he could of the old-world town, whose appearance suggested that it had gone to sleep for at least a century or two. He rambled for an hour or more about the Cathedral and Close, and the narrow streets with their old tumble-down houses, picturesque gables and projecting upper stories, jotting down a bit here and another there as the fancy took him.

Close under the time-worn figures which look down from their niches in the ancient gate on the passer from the street into the Close stands a rambling old building called the Cope-house. "Heere is it," says the old chronicle preserved in the Cathedral library, "y^t y^e Byschop doth donne hym y^e robes wc^h apperteyn untoe hys dynitie atte hys installement. Thence goeth hee forth byneath y^e gayte; & theerate mete hym M^r Deane, & wyth hym hys clergie; & theese wyth y^e chorristers chaunt hym a cheerfull noyse of welcom. Y^e w^{ch} ceerimonie is al don in y^e syte of y^e Twelve Holie Apostles wc^h bee up on y^e gayte, for y^t ye church of Coppesburie bee dedicate untoe y^e Twelve Apostles & al y^e Seynts."

A venerable grace lingers about the rough-

hewn effigies, something soft and mellow for eyes dazzled by the glare of gas and electric light to rest upon, soothing as is the change for ears stunned by the whirling roar of machinery to the sweet organ's music, when it laves the great roof in its melting caresses, and whispers round the pillars.

So have these sacred sentinels stood while generations passed in and out below them to worship and to work, telling in hushed tones, but clear to all who have attentive ears, of saintly brotherhood between the struggling tenants of earth and those who have won peace ; so do they still endure to pour balm and silent benediction on faithful hearts uncovered there before them.

The Cope-house's palmy days, if it ever had any, have long since departed. The robing-chamber, as it is called, remains, and to this day is appropriated to the quaint custom described above. But the spacious ground-floor is occupied by a book-shop, and the rest of the building is monopolised by the owner of the books and his family.

Arnold had been musing among the mementoes of past days that are to be met with in this queer secluded town, and transferring some of his impressions to his sketch-book in case he felt disposed to elaborate them later, when he stumbled upon the bulging windows of the

book-shop, stuffed full of soiled and faded volumes, with not a clean page to be seen anywhere. He was hesitating upon the threshold whether he should go in and explore farther when a scrap of doggerel pasted inside the glazed door caught his eye.

“Stranger who visitest these shores,
Before this mart thy wand’rings pause;
Enter, and contemplate the stock
Displayed upon the shelves of Rock.”

An invitation in which poetic imagery was restrained within the chaste boundaries of sense with such consummate propriety was not to be resisted, and Arnold found himself picking his way among the piles of musty literature that had leaked by degrees from overflowing cupboards and cases, and now almost concealed the floor. His first thought was to examine the shelves, when he was a little disappointed to find that they were constructed of quite ordinary wood. “Well,” he soliloquised, after rummaging to such purpose that he could scarcely have been better disguised to play the part of an amateur chimney-sweep, “I wonder who is the gardener of this wilderness; it wants weeding badly enough. There seems to be more chance here of hitting upon the Sibyl’s books than her cave, they’re hard enough to be very literal rocks ahead,” and he rubbed his shins after an encounter with a

heap of stiff bindings. His patience was rewarded by the appearance of a pair of feet at the top of a broken stairway in a dim corner of the shop. They were encased in shabby carpet slippers, between which and the frayed trousers an inch or so of dirty white stocking was rather too plainly visible. As they descended it became evident that this bravery belonged to a lean but thick-set old man, who rubbed his hands, and displayed a mouthful of discoloured and irregularly distributed teeth to his visitor.

"I was looking for the shelves of rock," said Arnold, indicating with a gesture the metrical composition on the door.

"You see them before you, sir," replied their owner, with a comical bow; "you perceive in me the author of that original poem, and the Rock therein referred to,—to wit, Christian name Hiram, surname Rock—utter them both together, and the person who answers 'here' will be found to stand in my shoes."

He was a jaunty old man with dirty white locks which were rumpled and unkempt like his general appearance. Mr. Rock evidently regarded his hair less as a personal adornment than as a convenient appendage to be turned to account. It was as forming a sort of umbrageous lair or nest for the spectacles which were so seldom across his nose that he found it chiefly useful, though

the economy effected by its subordinate functions—such as serving for a penwiper or towel—cannot be denied. He was standing opposite Arnold on the other side of the counter as he spoke, his hands in his pockets, and his mouth turned up at the corners with an affable and airy smile. Indeed all the angles of his somewhat rubicund face seemed to turn up, and this helped to give him an appearance far from venerable.

“Not that my name is by any means an accurate description of my nature, sir,” he continued; “for nothing could be in a general way more opposed to my feelings than stoniness. Why, my heart’s so soft that it has got me into scrapes before now, and I sometimes wish it wasn’t quite so doughy. It has a way of melting like snow at the least specimen of sunshine. After all, it’s better to be deceived than to deceive; and I’ll go so far as to say it’s more pleasant too. But it’s part of the irony o’ Fate, sir, that people should be born with inappropriate names; and yet there’s hardly a single writer of romance that knows it. Fate is always capricious and unreasonable; now I’m a man of principle, and that’s why I’m not a fatalist,” and he burst into a chuckle, or rather a subdued scream of satisfaction at the fluency of his argumentative faculty.

Arnold asked him how long he had carried on business at Copesbury.

“For the last twenty years or so,” was the reply. “Before that I was a member of the trade in the States for a good spell; it was there I learned how to write poetry. I’m getting on for seventy years of age now, sir, and beyond that I’m a trifle deaf, don’t feel much older than when I first settled down here. Some people think I wear rather well. It was the opinion o’ the late Duke o’ Ditchling. Just before his death he said to me, ‘You’re not much younger than me, Rock,’ says he, ‘but I’ll take odds that you’ll outlive my successor for all he’s a young chap;’ and it don’t seem unlikely that I may. There won’t be much estate left, though, to pay off wagers,” added the hero of this aristocratic reminiscence, with another chuckle. Then he started off again. “Once when he was hard up the old lord wanted me to dispose of his library for him, and I was engaged for a week or two in making a catalogue. It’s work I know something about, and I’m fond of it for its own sake. Well, when it was done I knew the contents of every volume in the list from Theology to Sport; there were a good lot of foreign books, too, and some Oriental ones. I had been acquainted with the bulk of ’em before; so there wasn’t much to be surprised at in that. We had dinner in the library that night, I and the Duke and

several of his friends,—all noblemen. Ah, there's not one of 'em left now, sir, out of that party but myself. It's sad to outlive those whom one has known and loved; Cicero says it's the chief misfortune of old age. I remember they all began joking together about me because I offered to quote out of any single book in the room. 'All right,' says his Grace,—he was always so keen on a wager—'I'll give you a dozen of champagne to a bottle o' ginger-beer you can't.' Of course I said 'done.' So he takes down a book at random, and tells me it's *Junius*. 'That's not a very hard one, my lord,' says I; 'open it wherever you like, and I'll quote off the page, if you give me a start.' I saw them all open their eyes at this; but that was nothing to what they looked when I'd quoted the piece word for word. My memory isn't what it was, but I can remember that piece to this day, perhaps on account of the champagne it got me. It was from that attack on the Duke of Bedford, where he says: 'Can grey hairs make folly venerable? and is no period to be reserved for meditation in retirement? Shame on you, my lord: let it not be said of you that in the latest hour of your career you followed the same worthless objects, the same restless ambitions in which your prime was spent. Consider that you are disgracing the venerable character of age, and exposing the imbecility of

the passions after you have lost their vigour.' 'Present company always excepted,' sings out his Grace, roaring with laughter, though the rest of the party looked rather foolish."

It may be surmised that Mr. Rock treated his noble friends to something better than this expurgated version of the original, or he certainly did not deserve to win his bet.

"That's just a specimen of what I could do once, sir, before I began to lose my cunning," said the Copesbury Nestor; "but a man can't sit still with his mouth open if he wants to acquire learning. When my son was young he used to come and ask me how he could get to be as wise as me. 'Get up for half a century at four in the morning and read till six,' was my advice; it's what I did myself, so that, allowing a good deduction for Sundays and accidents, there's something like 30,000 hours' reading stowed away inside me. You can't expect me to be just like my neighbours after that," and the bookseller raised his hands in modest deprecation of any surprise being expressed at his little idiosyncrasy. "But the generality of folks can't go in for brain work of that sort," he went on, resuming his former easy attitude; "they're unfitted by reason of there being no assiduity in 'em. Take our own people here in Copesbury. I have to press them even to come in and look round my shop by exhibiting

that original poem yonder to the vulgar vision. Since I've been here they've had a cultured focus, so to speak, in their midst,—What did Archimedes say? 'Give me a focus, and I will move the world,'—but they're scarcely improved, because they're too ignorant to want to know anything. A clergyman told me the other day that when he first went to his present living, close by here, he got on famously with the people, and could do anything with 'em; till one unfortunate Sunday, as luck would have it, he gave out from the pulpit that he'd be glad to meet any members of the congregation who liked to attend in the vestry after the service for the purpose of consulting about sending someone to represent them at the diocesan conference. Well, he waited there some time; and when nobody seemed coming, he set off home. Next day he was surprised by both the churchwardens calling on him together to protest against the popish doctrine they said he'd been preaching the day before. Of course he was a bit taken aback, especially as they only shook their heads and looked solemn when he told 'em he couldn't remember having said anything of that kind. Would you believe it, they thought he'd been asking the parishioners into the vestry to confess to him! and nothing he could say could shake it out of 'em either. That man's one of the most unpopular preachers in the diocese now.

He's taken to wearing a black gown, but it's no good ; they're skeery of him. Once frighten 'em, and they don't settle down again in a generation."

"Armitage had better get Mr. Rock to give him a few wrinkles," thought Arnold. He was getting tired for his own part, however, of sitting, or rather standing, at the feet of this Gamaliel ; but it was no easy matter to swim out of the current of the veteran's autobiographical eloquence. His deafness made him unconscious of his victim's anxiety to depart, and be at rest, and may have been partly assumed for this purpose. Anyhow, the verbal torrent flowed on pitilessly, and Arnold was submerged again.

"As a specimen of native pigheadedness that's poor, though. Old Dr. Goddard—he's the coroner, you know ; lives a mile or so out o' the town—he had a butler once with a good average Copesbury intellect, and no mistake. The beer used to run out very fast, faster than the doctor's company accounted for. So one day he sends for this butler, and says, 'The beer seems to evaporate, Thompkins ; a cask no sooner comes in full than you tell me it's empty, and we must get in some fresh.' Thompkins scratches his head, and can't make it out, let him think it over any way you like. 'Look here,' says the doctor at last, 'you take a bit of paper, and cock down every pint as you draw it for my table and the kitchen, and let

me see it when I ask for it.' Thompkins agreed all right, and said it was just what he was on the point of suggesting; but as he didn't leave off taking his private allowance as regular as before they soon found out what became of the extra pints above what he wrote down. After that the doctor thought he'd get on without a butler for a while, and trouser the brass himself. If he's ever asked to write Thompkins a testimonial, I reckon it'll be a snorter."

Mr. Rock pausing to take breath and enjoy his joke, Arnold adroitly seized the opportunity of expressing his desire to purchase a book on the counter. "Ah, that's a work of rare merit, sir," said the dealer; "scarce too. The Lord Chief Justice admired that book very much. He came to see me when he was last down here at the Assizes. Said he would have bought it if it hadn't been for his having it already at home. Hullo, what's this written inside?"

Holding the volume in one hand, he disentangled his spectacles from the jungle where they had hitherto lain in ambush, and proceeded to read: "'Morgan Smith, his book. The fifth copy; four others having been sacrificed to the rapacity of borrowers.' Well, sir, I trust you'll be more fortunate than poor Mr. Smith. There's plenty of lending libraries for people to borrow books from now-a-days; and then if they're lost they must be paid for."

The purchase was completed, considerably to the advantage of the vendor, for Arnold was eager not to risk further unlimited discussion by haggling ; and Hiram Rock was left to reflect with some pride how creditably he had sustained his character for cheerful invention and glib mendacity.

There are some people who cannot keep to the monotonous and dreary high road of truth if they would, but their feet must stray lightly along the elastic turf of fantasy, by which they as often as not gain the journey's end sooner, or at least more comfortably than their plodding fellows. Hiram had been long resigned to this fact, and, to do him justice, was as astute a pedestrian across country as one could wish to see. Why should lovers of the Ideal be severely distinguished, and the less considerable among them branded with a grievous social stigma ? Is it not by following some such instinct that men reach the summit of artistic, if not of commercial, respectability ? Philosophers have not been wanting to show us how trifling the difference really is between poets and liars. Mr. Rock's vocation should have been to write books, not to sell them.

CHAPTER VI.

“FOR AULD LANG SYNE.”

“*Oswald.* Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee !

Kent. What a brazen-faced valet art thou, to deny thou knowest me !”—KING LEAR.

“I MET a queer old fellow here when I was loafing about to-day,” said Arnold to Armitage as they were discussing their coffee and cigars after dinner that evening in the Canon’s comfortable bachelor quarters. “A bookseller who keeps below the Copehouse, isn’t it ? Rock I think his name was. A curious old boy in carpet slippers and a very seedy coat, with a tongue as long as my arm. The way he went on about his noble acquaintances in past days was wonderful.”

“I know the man. Quite a character, I believe. And he looks it, certainly.”

“Yes. Booksellers often are worth studying—second-hand booksellers at any rate. The

Cambridge ones certainly used to be very ordinary mortals, principally remarkable for a keen eye to business; but then they are kept alive by the brisk trade they drive. They have no chance of getting buried. But sometimes you do find very extraordinary specimens."

"Booksellers, if they are worth their salt, are apt to be enthusiasts, you see," said Armitage; "and enthusiasm is generally entertaining if the object of it is not so serious as to enlist one's sympathies too deeply. A man of the world must laugh at anything approaching to a monomaniac."

"I don't think this old gentleman can be called a monomaniac, unless an intense love of drawing the long-bow can be so entitled," said Robur. "I should think he must be rather a bore after a time. A little of that sort of thing goes a long way. But it's amusing for a while, though I certainly had enough of it in a very short time."

"How did you come across him?" asked Armitage. "What were you doing to take you into that den of his? It's not inviting from the outside."

"Oh! I was just poking about—I have a passion for investigation, you know. I wandered through all sorts of queer by-ways and alleys this afternoon—narrow, crooked streets that seem

to lead nowhere, as our tutor at Trinity said of the small colleges. The sarcasm was unintentional, but it was appreciated."

"You Trinity men always seem to feel it your duty to speak evil of every other seminary of sound learning," said Armitage. "It has the effect on an unfortunate outsider like myself of suggesting that possibly when it is necessary so strongly to emphasise the superiority, the superiority is not so substantial as it might be. You always seem to think Trinity 'the hub of the solar system.'"

"Perhaps we're not so far wrong either," said Robur. "Even Oxford men generally allow—however, we won't talk of that. I wonder if this old fellow really is tolerably capable. I rather want to find some one to catalogue my books at Oakleigh. I don't see why he shouldn't do as well as another."

"Oh, I fancy he's got his wits about him," said Armitage. "He may be a trifle shaky about the legs, but he's no cripple under the hat, as Uncle Remus says. I expect he puts on a good price to his goods when he meets with a likely customer."

"Human nature, to say nothing of book-sellers," observed Arnold. "They're all tarred with the same brush so far as that goes. A man must have an eye to his own interests.

That makes no difference in regard to my books, so long as he doesn't go off with anything. Though, for that matter, what he's to go off with from Oakleigh it would be hard to say."

Accordingly Arnold made his way back to the shop next morning. Mr. Rock received him with open arms—metaphorically—and mouth—literally.

"Back again soon, sir. Now it's wonderful what a fancy people take to my shop when once they've been inside. There was the Duke of Exford, sir—many's the time I've talked with his Grace by the hour together in this shop, and all because he happened to pick up a book he had a fancy for the first time he came in. Wonderful man, the Duke. Such an eye for a curious binding. I used to think sometimes he cared more about them than the insides. Perhaps he did. Now I never could understand that bibliomaniac's craze, sir. Give me a book with plenty inside it, and who cares what the cover's like? To be sure one does like to see good print and good paper and good leather at the back, but after all the binding's but the guinea stamp, the book's the gold for a' that, if I may be permitted to make an adaptation of the illustrious Nightingale of the North. Don't mind me, sir. Pray look

round and see if you can suit yourself. Now, here's a book you might like to look at—very rare and curious, and dirt-cheap at the price. But there's no demand for that sort of article now-a-days," he concluded, as Arnold showed no interest in the volume in question.

"You mentioned yesterday that you had had some experience in cataloguing and arranging libraries," said Arnold. "I should like to know what your terms for such work would be."

"Experience! Oh yes! There was Sir Duncan Vavasour's library, now. Very fine set of books he had. Not a large library; select, you know—about five thousand volumes. Some valuable books there; but such a state as they were in when I took them in hand you never saw—all higgledy-piggledy, odd volumes in different shelves, Mungo Park cheek by jowl with Newton's *Principia*, fine old Cicero leaning up against Rabelais, and so on. But bless you he never used to read them. Half the volumes were tumbling to bits, backs broken, leaves damp-stained and worm-eaten. Now it's worth while to have a library like that to work in, badly kept as it was; some very curious old tomes there. Very agreeable man, Sir Duncan. Used to say he wished I had the books and he had the price of them; we should use them both better that way. Very pleasant man, but no

scholar, sir. Now with you it's different, as I can see. You know a good book when you see one, and it's not so many people can do that."

Arnold had been examining the books one after another as the bookseller spoke, and wondering how long he would go on. At last however he became impatient, and managed with considerable exertion to keep his man to the business in hand, while he explained what he wanted and extracted his terms.

"But you see now, sir," the bookseller proceeded, "the season's just going to begin, and I've got my hands pretty full, of course. Not but what a second-hand business has a good deal going on all through the year: but the season makes a lot of difference. You wouldn't think, now, what a lot there is of it even in a little dead-alive place like this. I've often thought of going and setting up in town—but bless you, sir, I like the country, that's where it is; and this is as good as country, after all. And you see I've been fixed here so long I'd have to pull up a root or two if I were to move now."

"Do you mean that you haven't got the time to do my business?" said Arnold. "I suppose you're not likely to have more later on?"

"I can't quite say, sir. There's a precious lot to be done just now. But I'll see what I've got in hand and let you know if you like, sir.

Though I don't much expect I shall be able to do it."

"Well, you've got my address. If you have time you'd better write and say so, though I can't engage not to have got some one else to do it, of course. By the way, I shall be away for some while, so you'd better leave yourself a margin of time, as the letters will have to be forwarded."

"Very good, sir," responded Mr. Rock as Arnold went out.

"Now there's a chance," said the bookseller to himself when he was alone—"there's a chance I should have been glad of once. Big house, I suppose; lots of money too. That young fellow's evidently a bit of a swell, and he's as easy to cheat as—as"—he looked round him as though in search of a simile—"as unborn twins. (Wonder where I've heard that phrase before—rather effective.) Walk round him in no time. Sort of goose with golden eggs, I've no doubt, if he were only in judicious hands. Ah! those days are gone. I'm too old for that sort of thing now—not but what I've something left in me yet," he continued, straightening himself—or at least making an effort in that direction. "But once! Shade of—ahem! better not mention names—what a good thing you might have made of this. I wonder if he is a shade, though.

Perhaps he'll turn up again some day. H'm! it mightn't be altogether convenient for me, either, if he did, supposing he chose to rake up old scores. Well, well! He wouldn't find it easy to get hold of me, after all, if he did. And he's not likely to want to either."

Irony almost Sophoclean! Next morning as Mr. Rock was arranging some books lately received, there entered the shop a man with a bag. He was tall and somewhat spare in figure, but looked active and alert, and as if he had more life left in him than most men between forty and fifty. He greeted Mr. Rock, and said he had called on business connected with a weekly paper—the *Tuba Mirabilis*.

"Aha! my friendly penny trumpet!" said Mr. Rock. "If you'll step this way we can be private." So saying he led the way up the rickety stairs to his penetralia.

When Mr. Rock spoke the stranger quickly bent forward to scrutinise his face in the gloom of the low-ceiled shop. He said nothing however, and followed the bookseller upstairs. Once in his sanctum, Mr. Rock closed the door and motioned his visitor to a chair.

"Now, for your business, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Edwards, my name is," said the other, as he proffered a card. "My business can wait a few minutes though, Mr. Bennett."

The bookseller started. "You are mistaken. My name is Rock."

"Bennett, I think I said," calmly insisted the other.

"Who the devil are you?" ejaculated Rock, angrily.

"If it comes to that, who the devil are you, to be trading under a false name, I should like to know?" retorted his visitor, with that cool air of mastery which is best calculated to discompose an adversary.

Mr. Rock looked closely at him. "Eh? No it can't be. 'Gad, it is though. And how the what's-'is-name come you to be calling in connexion with the *Tuba*?"

"Never mind that, Bennett, my boy—"

"Rock, if you please."

"Rock, then. Never mind what I've been about. Here have I found you again, to all appearances a peaceable and industrious citizen, in the enjoyment of a comfortable income from a snug little business in a trade in which it's the custom, and therefore a guaranteed right, to take all the advantage you can of the verdant freshness and gullibility of the most gullible class of mortals on the face of the earth—book-fanciers to wit. Oh the frauds of this world! I thought I knew your voice the moment you spoke, but that poky shop of yours down there is so in-

fernally dark I couldn't see your face till I got up here. But there was no mistake about it then, though." Mr. Edwards burst out laughing. "I hope I've kept a little better than you, old man."

Mr. Rock was sitting dejectedly all sunk together in his chair, with an appearance of having had his bones taken out, gazing into the fire. His comrade's levity failed to rouse him.

"To think of your having come back and opened it all up again!" he said gloomily. "Just when I've settled well down and become an institution, too. I did think I'd got quiet at last."

The other burst out laughing again. "A nice way to welcome an old friend, that. And I should like to know what I've done or said to disturb your peace and quietness. However we'd better get our business done sharp. Fact is, I've come down about the circulation of the *Tuba*. You don't seem to have been selling as many as you used to do, and you're the only bookseller here who sells for us. Let's talk it over; then we can have a chat about old times, eh, old man?"

Mr. Rock did not altogether seem to appreciate his visitor's tone, but he acquiesced like a man who has no help for it. They despatched their

business quickly, and then Edwards settled himself in his chair with an air of intending to stay there. The resignation stamped on the bookseller's face would have been pathetic if it had not had too much of the ludicrous in it.

"Got a pipeful of 'baccy to offer an old friend, after so long a separation?" inquired his visitor, with a grin at the other's disconsolate appearance.

Mr. Rock handed him a jar, and Edwards proceeded to fill and light his pipe: then he leaned back comfortably in an arm-chair, took some placid whiffs at his briar, and like a man who holds the tenace over his adversary, waited to be led up to.

Mr. Rock sighed once or twice, and then in turn silently lighted his pipe. "I was always afraid you'd turn up again somewhere," he said dolefully. "It's very hard on a man that he can't bury and forget what's past and done with. I thought I had got rid of it all, though, at last."

Edwards laughed again. He was immensely tickled by the bookseller's thorough despondency, and was at no trouble to conceal his amusement. "Come," he said, "don't put on that long face, old man. There's no reason why we should remember everything of old times. There's a great deal of it that was jolly enough; and for the rest," he shrugged his shoulders carelessly,

"what does it matter? So long as you're ready to give a helping hand to a friend, I'm quite ready to let bygones be bygones. But of course—"

"Yes, there's always a 'but,' that's the worst of it. I knew there was bound to be a 'but' with you; it always was your way, you know—Edwards," said the bookseller.

"Of course, you know by this time, Rock, that if one man puts another man's name on a piece of paper without authority, any third person who is acquainted with the transaction, and can prove the facts, is in a position to make it rather tight for somebody — supposing he wants to."

Rock simply writhed under these observations, despite their general character, but said nothing. Edwards continued, watching him.

"Supposing he wants to—there's the point. And there are some other little things—peccadilloes, let's call them,—of which the law is pleased to take a more serious view than perhaps is warranted by their enormity. But we needn't mention them. Purely general remarks, my dear fellow,—no particular application. Why should there be? But you and I always used to understand one another."

Mr. Rock showed signs of being roused. "I don't think you ever came to grief from not

understanding either me or any one else," he said bitterly.

Edwards inclined his head, with a mock obeisance. "I believe you're right," he said, "though I says it as shouldn't. I acknowledge the compliment with thanks. It is cheerful to find one's talents appreciated by any one, in this cold hard world."

"I don't fancy appreciation of your talents is likely to lead to any greatly increased respect for your personality," said Rock.

Edwards assumed a look of astonishment. "Can I believe my ears? Let me congratulate you on the acquisition of a sarcastic vein. I don't remember anything of the sort in old times. How did you come by it, old man? Don't be too careless how you use it, though. It isn't always safe to stir sleeping dogs, you know."

Mr. Rock said nothing, but thought to himself that unless his old comrade was mightily changed, which he didn't seem to be, it would take a great deal of sarcasm to rouse him into neglecting his own interests for purposes of vengeance. Edwards seemed to read his thoughts.

"Ah! it's to my interest to keep quiet, you think: and so long as that's the case there's no fear of my babbling? Well, perhaps it is—so long as you keep friendly and don't mind doing a friend a good turn now and again. But you

see, I have a pull over you, old man ; and if the worst comes to the worst, I've a deal less to lose by the publication of certain little facts in our past history than you have. It would be a great blow to have tales told of a respectable citizen—respectable even if he does seem a bit eccentric," added Edwards cruelly—for unless the eccentricity be an affectation, it is not pleasant to its owner to be told of it—"such as how once in his younger days—"

"Now don't talk like that—don't !" ejaculated the bookseller in an agony.

"Well, well," said Edwards with an assumption of good humour, "we won't talk more of that. Perhaps it's as well not to be too explicit, so long as we understand one another, as I said before. That's all I want."

Brutal insensibility by itself is apt to fall by its own mass, and generally handicaps a man heavily in the race of life : but the same quality, when combined with cunning, and used artistically, is one of the most formidable weapons a man can possess. The power of cutting with a steady hand deeper and deeper into the soul and watching the victim writhe beneath the operation, yet without flinching—even delighting in the ruthlessness of the task—this power is given to few : and those who possess it may often sway their fellow-men and rise above circumstance ;

but they 'are men to be feared always—hated often—loved never. Their associates are their victims, who would break the bond if they dared, or were able. Edwards was one of these men. Without the qualities which go to form the villain on a large scale, he had all the pitiless selfishness, all the low cunning to help it, which fit a man to hold a tyranny over his associates in evil. Had he taken to it, his natural insensibility to the pain of others would have made him an excellent surgeon. But vivisection is not usually practised on men's hearts with a view to the benefit of any one but the practitioner. Edwards knew his man: he had a purpose in his method; but apart from that the mere mental condition of Mr. Rock was an entertaining study. He sat back in his chair as he talked through the whiffs of his pipe, and watched the bookseller keenly and with a sense of enjoyment, making note mentally of his transition from dejection to irritability, and from irritability to the most abject suffering, and feeling some pride in the skill with which he could make stage succeed stage just as he wished it to do so.

“Well,” said Rock sullenly after a pause, “what is it you want me to do, to come to the point? I suppose you want money, though you don't look so confoundedly hard up.”

Edwards laughed. “I dare say I look more

prosperous than you do, old man: I hope I do, in all conscience — though all isn't gold that glitters, you know, and a good coat may make an empty pocket. No, I don't want money—at least not on the spot, and from you. It would be mean to come begging of an old friend, wouldn't it?"

"Well, what in thunder do you want, then?" asked the other. He looked relieved, however, to find that there was no immediate call on his purse-strings.

"Oh! the fact is I'm sick of this business. It's all very well for a while. There's plenty to do, and lots of fools to—well, on whom to exercise those faculties for which you were so good as to compliment me just now. But it's damned drudgery, and one gets awfully tired of it after a bit. Couldn't we manage a *coup* of some sort together, eh? You used to be a great hand at devising a *coup*, you know."

Rock shook his head. "I'm quite out of that sort of thing. Couldn't do it if I tried now, and I haven't tried for years and years. I'm quite a reformed character, and when a man has got straight you can't expect him to get out of it. After all, there's nothing like honesty and a quiet life, you know. The Earl of Watney used to say to me, 'Rock,' said he, 'you're a lucky man; you've got a calling

where you can cheat as much as you please and still be an honest man.' Witty man, his lordship." Mr. Rock was recovering himself, and fell into his habit of story-telling instantly and naturally in consequence. "Often and often—"

"Oh ! drop that rot," said Edwards. "Never mind your cursed aristocrats. If you get on to them I know we shall get stuck where we are. Damn your maudlin morality ; none of your dinners of herbs for me. I go in for the stalled ox—when I can get him."

"Don't see how I'm going to help you to any, though," said the bookseller. "I'm quite out of the way of them myself." And he looked ruefully at his rusty habiliments.

"Which means that you're not on with me, I suppose," said Edwards. "Well, just as you like : but remember what I said. So long as a man is ready to help a friend, it's not reasonable that that friend should be too careful to rake up the past : but if you've got the whip hand, there's no reason why you shouldn't use your advantage—fairly and honourably and above-board, of course. Now just try and think a bit. Can't you offer a suggestion ?"

The bookseller pondered. "It's no go, Edwards," he said slowly ; "no go. Now there was a young chap in here—when was it ?—yesterday, who might have been a subject for

you—Robur his name was. Gentleman, seems to have a big house—at least he's got a good library—and lots of money, I should think. Wanted me to go there and catalogue the books. It's not good enough, though. Besides, what could I do with him? He's going to be away from home, and I don't see any opening for myself. Now if it had been you—you might have made something of it."

"H'm. Don't see why we shouldn't, now. Why shouldn't I go there as your assistant, or better, as your deputy?" said Edwards hopefully, as new possibilities opened themselves out before him. "It might be worth trying. Why not?"

"And what would you do when you got there? How are you going to make anything out of it? unless you go in for burglary," said Rock, laughing. He had now quite recovered, and entered into the spirit of the thing with a zest of which he could never have suspected himself a few hours before.

"Burglary? ahem! it doesn't sound well, does it? But what's in a name? 'A rose by any other name,' you know. By Jove! quoting Shakespeare! This won't do, out of the shop. Never mind what I do when I get there. Give me a start and I'll engage to help myself on. Why shouldn't I go instead of you? Just fancy me grinding away at cataloguing books, though!"

The pair, now quite amicable, settled that this should be so, and after arranging some details, parted in comparative hilarity.

A couple of days later, Mr. Rock received a note from his colleague. "Won't do," the latter wrote. "At least, not as we settled. I've met your phoenix, he came to our office to-day. Now it would hardly do if he were to discover that I went to catalogue his books; especially if anything wrong happened while I was there. You must write and say you can go, and I'll be in the neighbourhood, and we'll see what can be done. If Robur were safe to be out of the way all the time, it would be different; but anyway you'd better go. Perhaps I might come and help you to make the list, you know."

CHAPTER VII.

“ SWEETNESS AND LIGHT.”

“For although no fountain on earth can compare with the clearness of Helicon, yet there lies at the bottom a thick sediment of slime and mud ; for so Apollo begged of Jupiter, as a punishment to those who durst to taste it with unhallowed lips, and for a lesson to all not to drink too deep or far from the spring.”—*Swift*.

THE official residences of the fourth estate are situated in the quarter of Philistia ; and thither Arnold was conveyed by Robert Paston the morning after his arrival at the latter's house in Wimpole Street. Threading their way through a number of narrow and dirty thoroughfares, they found themselves standing before an unpretentious building at the top of Ascalon alley, and were forthwith shown into a room on the first floor. A bearded individual was reclining in an arm-chair before the fire, correcting proofs.

“Aha ! my literary leech,” cried he as Paston entered ; “this is an opportune visit. I am writing an article on ‘The March of Medical

Science during the past year,' and find myself absolutely sticking for want of a fact or two to form the nucleus."

"How d'ye do, Mr. Robur?" said this worthy, when Arnold had been introduced, "very happy to see you have followed professional advice in making yourself acquainted with the most central of social ganglia, sir."

"Don't go on like that, Mr. Bloss; you will make my friend nervous. The fact is we've called to find out whether you can't make use of him now and then to review a book. He's not in need of work from a pecuniary point of view; and though he's had no actual experience in journalism, he is a man of more culture than your average literary hack, and comes here fresh from a pretty extensive course of European travel."

This summary of his merits was not very enjoyable to Arnold, but Mr. Bloss did not seem to consider the terms in which it was couched by any means extravagant. "Well," replied that gentleman, "of course you know how many calls upon him a person in my position has. I assure you I have ten times as many applications as I can satisfy" (which was quite true). "But, of course, knowing you, Paston, as I do, it's a different matter; and I shall be delighted to be of assistance to Mr. Robur, even to the extent of

reading through any independent article he sends me, though I can't promise to insert it."

"This season of the year is naturally a brisk one for our trade," observed Mr. Bloss, when Arnold had tendered his thanks. "Christmas time brings the conservative side of the public uppermost, and is for that reason a joyful festival for us journalists, who have to shape our stuff accordingly."

"I always thought," said Arnold, "that the frost and snow of December brought with them an unusually keen blast of criticism on the journals."

"Quite so," returned the editor; "but then we court it; like the man in the fable, we have taken good care to provide ourselves with great-coats, and the breeze can only wrap these more closely about us. You see, my good sir, the same thing comes regularly every year, and we know exactly what sort of weather to prepare for; so we just lie up in our snug forest of Arden, and whistle 'Blow, blow, thou winter wind,' carelessly enough. Now at other times the temperature is so changeable we don't know what to expect; and so we're always losing by it."

"It's much the same in our profession," remarked the doctor. "Cases increase during the annual plum-pudding carnival; and the best of

it is that the symptoms always exhibit a wonderful uniformity. Otherwise we might be rather inconvenienced by the extra demand on our offices. As it is, we sally forth gleefully every morning, armed with the light aperient and cooling drug."

"That's it, sir. Now look at us: we've had our properties carefully packed away all the year where we can find 'em. Then at the appropriate moment we trot out the Star of Bethlehem glittering with fresh paste, repair the battered manger, and furbish up our job lot of tarnished swords and helmets for the faded Cherubim and Seraphim. Nothing could be simpler when you can reckon on human nature like this; and we make the most of our chances in this shop."

Mr. Bloss was allowed to speak for himself. He did not attract his hearers' sympathies, and it is to be hoped that his attitude on this point does not represent that of most of his fellow-craftsmen. His inconsiderate want of tact would have betrayed the vulgar-minded tradesman even if his manners and exterior had been more polished than they were. His abilities were small; and all he acquired was for a temporary purpose, and soon dissipated. As a very young man he might not have been deficient in enthusiasm; but his experience on the various news-

papers with which he had been connected had warned him in good time that this was a foible to be corrected, except in so far as it could be exalted to the level of a marketable article. For this purpose it must be, as is well known, of a peculiarly elastic nature ; and Mr. Bloss had not been slow in cultivating this admirable quality. He was a judicious trimmer ; and the secret of his success as a journalist lay in the fact that long practice had trained him thoroughly in the art of maintaining a masterly self-adaptability by the side of a show of earnest conviction. His finger was always upon the pulse of public opinion ; while his readers were satisfied that it was he who guided that blind and arbitrary force, originating so much of it as was right, and conscientiously opposing it when it was wrong, for the common good. Leader-writing is a form of amusement in which a taste for inconsistency may be indulged more freely than is allowed in any other kind of serious effusion. It may be on account of the shadowy and impersonal authority attached to the modicum of declamation which daily and weekly garnishes the table of every respectable householder ; it may be the very transient effect produced upon the intelligence of the persons addressed, the peaceful oblivion of what the leader said yesterday in which we skim the leader to-day. But, whether

it be the irresponsibility of the stuff, or the ease with which it fades from the memory, leaving as clean a *tabula rasa* as it found, the journalist's stock of information need not be less perishable than his ephemeral productions; nor is a retentive mind much better than an encumbrance to him, whatever may be the case with the professed liar. In the absence of evidence to the contrary one would be disposed to suspect the author of the saying "Teach me rather to forget" of having been at some time of his life a manufacturer of leaders or 'pars.'

But an excursion behind the scenes was Mr. Bloss's pet subject of familiar intercourse; so he did not pause long enough for his visitors' silence to appear anything but a well-bred sign of concurrence in his remarks.

"Well, gentlemen, we caterers for the public benefit have to keep a careful eye on the prevailing tastes and tendencies of consumers. Now, you know, the great tendency of our time is towards sensationalism in journalism; and this tendency is slowly fighting its way onwards and upwards from the lowest to the highest classes, from pinching poverty to gilded aristocracy. A few years ago the rage for this sort of thing was confined to the uninstructed million, the classes among whom the cheap cut-throat found a ready acceptance;" here the lecturer cleared

his own throat, happily a whole one, and the doctor winked surreptitiously at Arnold; "the taste for this Mother Midnight literature was, however, currently held to be depraved in the *monde* of fashion, and the few cheap serials and papers which adopted such a tone for conveying their ordinary and sober facts were said to pander to the vitiated mob, and encourage low cravings. What lady with a reputation would have allowed her area steps to be defiled with a copy of the *Daily Dustman*, or her fair finger-tips to be soiled by contact with the *Monthly Muckrake*, otherwise than by suspending the garbage at the extremity of a pair of tongs? But how stands the case now? Realism is fast becoming a *pièce de résistance* in fiction, and the same tendency is observable in journalism of the first water."

"That being so," observed Paston, "it must be a great consolation to reflect that when you swim with the tide the liquid that supports you is of the best quality. But, as you say, facts have got to be dressed up now-a-days to look as much like fiction as possible, if their compilers want them to be worth much as 'copy' for the papers; and, by all the shams in devildom, you know how to mix your colours, Mr. Bloss."

The editor was flattered. "Our organ will not sound so blatant in a year or two as some people think it does now," said he, smiling.

“Yes, sir, the Frightful and the Scandalous are the two best colours in the box. There is nothing I know of better than these,—varied, of course, with the sparkling interview, or fancy sketch. Our trade presents a new field for inventive genius, sir, a philanthropic opening for original talent. And that reminds me,” he added, going towards a speaking-tube, “that we can show you a sample of the article.” So saying he whistled, and inquired if an individual addressed as “Mac” was disengaged and would step up to join them.

“I always call him Mac,” explained Mr. Bloss, “but that isn’t his real name; it’s fond for Machiavelli, who wasn’t a Scotchman, I believe. But the wily Italian would have been an innocent at contriving ruses, compared to Edwards.”

The hero of this eulogy, entering at that moment, was forthwith presented to Arnold; Paston was already acquainted with him, so there was no need to repeat the ceremony in his case. Arnold saw before him a man midway between forty and fifty. His hair and beard, which was a thick one, were of a dull, colourless complexion,—certainly not dark, but scarcely pronounced enough to be called positively fair. His head was beginning to turn grey in patches, but his frame was wiry, and full of nervous activity, like that of quite a young man; in

short, the whole figure was that of one perpetually on the alert. A police description would probably have called him tall and slight; but true as such isolated characteristics might be, they would be positively misleading if they stood alone, unqualified by that strange physical tension and agility which most of all occupied the observer's attention, and recalled something of the trained athlete.

Such was Arnold's impression of the man to whom he bowed. Had he been watching him less closely, he might have missed seeing a certain inexplicable trace of embarrassment which showed itself in Mr. Edwards' manner, and deepened the habitual expression on his face, at the name of Robur. Not that Arnold consciously connected the two things at the time; cruelty and fear are only too commonly found together as ingredients of character; and the crafty advertising agent had forgotten himself for once, and by a momentary revelation furnished an example of this unnatural compound. The phenomenon was less surprising than disgusting, and the very frequency with which nature is perverted, either in this, or some other way, takes off the keen edge of the disgust; so that Edwards was soon able by an elaborate assumption of ease to dispel much of the bad impression caused by his bungling.

Fortunately for him the voluble Bloss, with his coarse familiarity, provided an invaluable counter-irritant, and would almost have made a blackamoor appear white by contrast.

“There he stands, gentlemen; our secret emissary, the chief of our *corps diplomatique*. Fresh from the foray, I’ll be bound. Hast scented carrion of late, my tame vulture, that thou look’st so crop-full?”

The agent intimating that his morning had not been idle, Bloss was transported to a degree of admiration incapable of being communicated to laymen.

“Ah, Mac, Mac!” he murmured with the tears in his eyes, “what an incorrigible old hardshell you are!”

“The editorial nature may have its weaknesses,” he went on to remark after this ebullition of feeling, “but the sterner side soon conquers them. The advertising department, I admit, is my one vulnerable point; it is the centre of our affections, the home towards which all the imaginative romance within us yearns. All the other contents of our paper are subservient compared to the advertisements. It is for them that we strive to make our articles attractive, and secure a large circulation. It is for this end that Mac and his attachés may be found everywhere, cajoling and threatening. They have a difficult

mission to perform, but it is one worthy of a man's intellect, and teems with grand possibilities. To persuade the recalcitrant and backward, to hold up before them the example of rivals who are in the habit of keeping themselves before the public notice by occupying the most prominent spaces with their announcements; to hint the probability of the prudent insertors seeing their goods, patents, or inventions specially written up in a leader, and to suggest how unpleasantly the consequences might affect those who refuse to accept our offer of bettering their own position,—all this affords scope for talent of a very peculiar order, gentlemen; now don't it?"

Arnold turned to Edwards. "So that is what you have to do, is it?" said he. Bloss was engrossed in refuting some cavil of the doctor's, and his attention was evidently distracted for the moment from his trusty squire. Edwards made sure of this before he replied.

"Well, not exactly. It may be quite true of a business like this in its earlier stages, before it has established itself. Of course I can't say what dodges may not be employed occasionally at such a time. All I can vouch for is that, for the period during which I have been associated with the success of the concern, the business of my department has been quite open and satisfactory."

Edwards had reason to congratulate himself on having seized the opportunity. He saw that it would be easy to make his chief seem entirely responsible for the bad impression which Arnold had formed of these professional mysteries. As for that fantastic young purist, if he chanced to make any false inference from the agent's carefully-worded reply, it was at his own risk, and he should have remembered that he was talking to a diplomatist. Edwards had, indeed, been associated with the *Tuba* through a great part of its development; having seen it grow to its present dimensions, from what may be described as its penny trumpet stage. But this is a detail; and, since audacity often turns out to be the safest weapon in diplomacy, it remained undiscovered.

Arnold was trying to believe that he had judged this new acquaintance too harshly all the time the latter was conducting him over the office; for they had slipped out of the room for this purpose without disturbing the others.

But when they had exhausted the novelty (to the visitor) of the warehouse, and the publishing and advertising departments, they had scarcely approached any nearer to intimacy than when they began; and yet they talked a good deal. The conversation was, however, not with-

out its effects; Arnold left off attempting to account for his odd antipathy to the agent on any rational ground; and Edwards was satisfied that fortune had once again favoured her son, by establishing beyond a doubt the identity of Paston's friend with Hiram Rock's patron. He did this by means of a few clever questions, put with an off-hand air, and sounding like the usual polite nothings which men improvise more or less clumsily to tide over some casual intercourse. Thus, checking a yawn, he asked Arnold, with admirably simulated *ennui*, if he did not wish himself in the country to enjoy the passing gleam of sunshine.

"I might do so more if I had not just come up to town," was the response.

"You are in a fortunate position, sir. Of course I get my little annual outing; but my enjoyment of the beauties of nature, and all its charms, is cut so short that it only makes me feel the want of it all the worse afterwards. Now and then I work up our agents in the provinces; but of course I seldom halt in any but the larger towns. There's no pleasure about that, because they all try to be like London, and don't do it well."

"That is certainly not the case in our part of the world. We are rural in the good old humdrum style; but I should hardly suppose you

would know our neighbourhood," and Arnold told him where it was.

"No; that's rather out of my beat; the *Tuba's* awakening blast is scarcely likely to penetrate to such a remote corner."

Cautiously abstaining from pumping the young man much further, he conducted him back to the editorial presence. Arnold's simplicity—which, by the way, he rather overrated—seemed to argue well for the success of the campaign which had been so lately developed in the bookshop at Copesbury. The chief obstacle in the way of its fulfilment was the evident intimacy between its projected victim and Paston; and Edwards knew the doctor well enough to feel that this circumstance was an unlucky factor in the business.

"It's a devilish happy coincidence, though," he mused, "my meeting them together here. I know now who my enemies are, and I must be careful not to show myself to them anywhere near Oakleigh. I could turn this young fool round my finger if he were alone. As he isn't, we must keep things darker than ever."

Lunch was the next thing on the tapis, and they all went to have it together at an adjoining restaurant. Bloss told them how he had gone over to Ireland early in life, and become connected with a small provincial paper over there. A bottle of port made him wax communicative,

and he described his rapid rise to the post of editor.

"Home rule was the ticket, you know," said he, favouring the company to a comprehensive wink; "and it wasn't until I persuaded the governor to sell the property, and start here in London, that I ripened into the fine old Tory you see me. Alliterative epithets are as good a stock-in-trade on one side as the other, and I shouldn't be surprised if you see me some day come forward in the cause of the immaculate democracy, and all that sort of thing."

"Take care I don't expose you," said the doctor; "such tampering with my cherished convictions would justify me in killing you off early when I get the chance."

Bloss laughed. "Not if I make you taste your prescriptions first, doctor. The only thing we want now," he proceeded, "is a good libel case. Perhaps next year we shall be well able to afford it, and then I shall try to persuade the governor; eh, Mac? We must move heaven and earth to give you a little commission of that sort. Among all the list of puffs extraordinary there's nothing like it. Remunerative? don't mention it."

What would our pious ancestors have thought of the priesthood of journalism as exemplified by Mr. Bloss? The pastor appointed by the State

has been said to be unable to deal effectually with spiritual needs ; but what of his substitute, the 'able editor' ? Is there no cant or gabble, no trace of vagueness or fatuity, in the gospel which he delivers to the respectable and self-satisfied ?

Arnold had to keep an appointment with his solicitor that afternoon ; so leaving Paston to go his rounds, he set off for the City with a light step, expressive of his relief at being at length rid of his late companions. Arrived at his destination, a clerk from the dingy outer office showed him at once into a snug room, turkey-carpeted, and adorned with engravings of legal luminaries surmounting pigeon-holes and deed-boxes. Here he was warmly greeted by the senior partner of the firm ; who after a few preliminaries proceeded to give him a detailed account of the property of which he stood possessed.

"You are to be congratulated, Mr. Robur, on the enviable state of your affairs : " this was the conclusion arrived at by the old gentleman after his review of the administration of the estate by himself and Mr. Dalton.

"Every year the value of land is more and more depreciated ; but you will not be touched directly by that, since only a small fraction of your income is derived from that source. The

rest depends upon the very soundest securities to be had in the market ; and your real estate is not only of manageable extent, but comes to you free from every sort of encumbrance."

Arnold thanked him heartily for the way in which he had performed his stewardship, and declined to look at the inventories of furniture and valuables, merely asking that they might be despatched to him at Oakleigh.

"Your mother's jewels are at the bank," said the senior partner. "At her death we checked them off by a list which we found inside the lid of the case. I grieve to say that a certain ring, minutely described in the list, was missing, and we have never been able to trace the suspicion of its theft home to any one. It was the first present ever given to her by your father, and was the token of their engagement. I believe it was a sort of heirloom in his family, and seems to have been rather a valuable specimen of mediæval jewellery."

"I think I remember it," replied Arnold. "A gold ring of massive workmanship, with a great boss set with some large stone. It was so big that my mother used to wear it with a guard."

"Yes, it was a man's ring. The stone was a heart-shaped sapphire ; and the boss you speak of was richly enamelled with crimson. There

was a motto inside, if I remember rightly ; *Amor rex et lex.*"

"Very likely ; I was too young to notice that, but I could recognise the ring anywhere. So the guard has disappeared with it ?"

"I suppose so ; probably it was not of sufficient value to be mentioned separately. The loss is quite unaccountable ; why something more modern and less valuable for its associations wasn't taken is a mystery to me. It is most annoying that your general satisfaction should have to be marred in this way ; but you see it happened before the property came under our control, and we have kept our own counsel about it since."

Arnold hastened to relieve his kind friend of any anxiety as to his reception of the disclosure, and begged him to trouble his head no more about the matter. Nevertheless he was considerably exercised in his own mind, and thought of nothing else all the way back to Wimpole Street. He was convinced that neither Mrs. Marchpane nor Gibbins knew anything about the sparkling toy which he used to play with on his mother's knee. Those honest souls would have told him long ago if they had ever had a doubt of the trinket being in safe and responsible hands. It was probable, moreover, that Joshua did not even know of its existence. Under the cir-

cumstances he resolved to say nothing about the ring at home ; it would only make his faithful old dependants miserable to no purpose. Next he considered whether he should make a confidant of Paston. At first he was inclined to do so ; the doctor was just the sort of man to come out with a shrewd suggestion on the subject. Afterwards, however, he reflected that his friend would in all probability suspect the wrong person, there being no data to go upon,—if, indeed, the ring had been stolen at all. Anyhow, it was always possible to share the secret in the event of any future occurrence tending to throw light on the question. Arnold’s mind was soon made up : in spite of his sceptical bias he was not wanting in decision.

CHAPTER VIII.

BURNPORT.

“Silent he went by the sand of the many-thundering ocean.”

Homer.

“WELL,” said Paston, when he and Arnold were seated together that evening discussing the state of affairs, “now that you’ve got your business matters settled, and the brilliant prospect before you of becoming an occasional contributor to a leading weekly, you think fit to go off a-wandering again.”

“Excuse me, but I don’t,” replied Robur.

“Cantankerous one, you have no sooner come home than you have resolved to clear out again, and I call that wandering : no matter if you do mean finding a rest for the sole of your foot, and sticking to it. So don’t contradict. Personally, I am of opinion that you are perfectly right. You’ve been knocking about all over Europe and seeing multitudinous cities of men,—even if

you haven't learnt their minds, like the godlike much-enduring one : and you want rest."

"I do," said Arnold ; "rest of a kind, that is."

"Precisely : not unmitigated idleness, which deluded mortals have persuaded themselves into regarding as a synonym for the genuine article—instead of being the most wearying, enervating, and generally depressing way of passing the time you can well find. Now it seems to me that to let yourself get bored is about the worst thing you could do in your present frame of mind ; and after the crowd of perpetual novelties you've been getting accustomed to abroad, you would get sick of Oakleigh precious soon. Hunting isn't in your line, and the men who hunt would make your life a burden, I should think."

Paston himself had never indulged in the delights of the chase, and looked with supreme contempt upon those whose lives, he conceived, were given up to sport.

"I don't fancy hunting, I own," said Arnold, who was aware that his friend viewed that occupation as he would have viewed vivisection without the justification of scientific advantages to be reaped from it ; "however, the question is, where am I to go ? Consider the requirements you've been enumerating. It's to be a place where I shan't be bored and can't get over excited."

"Burnport," said the doctor laconically.

"Burnport—well, what are the merits of that delightful sea-side resort?"

"Well, I defy you to get excited there, and if you use your wits you needn't be bored. Where there is sea, you can boat and bathe: and apart from the intrinsic merits of speeding over the unharvested ocean, you'll find some of the sailors excellent and refreshing society if you choose judiciously. It'll do your nerves all the good in the world. Have a weed."

"Thanks, I will, having a firm belief that tobacco is the best known cure for nerves."

"Which nobody can deny," said Paston, "barring a few misguided members of my own profession who I don't believe ever tried for themselves, and the majority of the other sex, who are jealous because Mrs. Grundy won't let them assist in smoking the pipe of peace. They'd smoke like chimneys if they were allowed, and then they'd give up having hysterics. It is even possible that they would become logical, though that," quoth this misogynist, "is rather too much to hope for. Go to Burnport, bathe, take exercise, make some acquaintances if you can, and take your pipe thoughtfully, as the immortal bard recommends. And with the *Tuba Mirabilis* to back you up, and let off your superfluous energy on, you'll have got over your troubles in a month

—even if your contributions occasionally find an early grave in Mr. Bloss's wastepaper-basket."

"Excellent advice," said Arnold, applying a match to his cigar, "if your diagnosis is correct, Paston. But I don't believe in nerves: I never had any in my life. The fact at the back of my griefs, my friend, is the aimlessness of my present existence, and till I find some sort of aim, I don't believe I shall be cured of my eternal introspection and worrying. Perhaps I shall find one some day; anyhow, we'll see what Burnport can do towards providing something; and at least it ought to take me out of myself for a bit. Your tonic shall have a fair trial, at any rate. I had Burnport in my mind more or less before you suggested it. Do you know anything of the hotels there?"

"Lots," said Paston; and he proceeded to give his friend sundry pieces of advice as to the satisfactory management of matters at his seaside abode.

So it was settled. Arnold returned to Oakleigh next day, to make such small preparations as were needed before a more lengthened absence: and disregarding Mrs. Marchpane's head-shakings at what she viewed as mere love of wandering on his part, went off to Burnport, leaving the care of his property to "rest upon" the shoulders of the honest Gibbins.

We English, perhaps merely because we owe everything to it, generally look upon the sea as the emblem of that freedom which we have always set before us as a national ideal. The love of both, we like to think, is our birthright as against all other nations, so that we alone can understand fully the triumphant cry of the wandering Greeks when they saw the Euxine spread out before them. Be that as it may, we are all glad to get to the seaside, even that majority to whom actual life on the ocean wave would be productive of anything but poetical thoughts or lofty emotions. For on shore we can contemplate the waves without the actual physical discomfort and insecurity; and there are few grander sights than a calm sea, except a stormy one. To stand and watch the breakers rolling in, 'one crowd, but with many a crest,' each like yet each unlike the last, rising in the distance into a hissing point of foam which it leaves behind, as it slides silent and unerring from beneath it, then seeming to tower higher than ever till it bursts in thunder, all white now, and hurls its masses high into the air above the grey cliff, and then draws back with a dying moan and loses itself in its successor—this is a sight not soon to be tired of. But it is scarcely less splendid when sudden squalls are darkening it here and there with an ominous ripple, or

when it rests undisturbed, and only the slow heaving remains to tell that there is still a life there to be roused to the same wild fury.

It was in this last mood, sleeping in quiet grey under the misty sky of November, that Arnold saw it when he reached his destination, and, after arranging matters at his hotel, strolled along the bay in the direction of the old town. At that season there are few visitors to Burnport, so that there was no fashionable crowd on the Parade, no bright colours in the shop-windows; but down here on the beach there was now and again a group of children, finding all the delight that children do in piling huge castles for the waves to engulf and obliterate, in hunting out the coy anemone from his little pool in the rocks, or in the simpler but more adventurous pleasure of standing just where the waves wash up and running away with a scream of triumph in time to escape dryshod, or of yet more frantic ecstasy if they were just too late, and a larger wave than usual washed over their boots while the careless nursemaid's eyes were turned away, fixed on the manly form of some dallying companion. Farther on a group of donkey boys were very anxious that Arnold should indulge in quasi-equestrian exercises, and each was at great pains to recommend the superior excellence of his animal, though there was not the

slightest chance of any of them being put in requisition ; and at another point was a line of boats whose owners were equally emulous of the honour of taking him out for a sail. But Arnold was not to be tempted on this occasion, although he had nothing to do, and the air was mild—for the time of year at least. There was indeed scarcely enough wind for sailing, and the sun was quickly approaching the headland that shut in the bay on the west : and Arnold wished to see something of the place with such daylight as was left him. So he turned a deaf ear to the Sirens in oilskin, and sauntered on at his leisure till he reached the quay in the old town.

Burnport, like many of our modern watering-places, is a combination of two towns, the old and the new. The new town is the fashionable end, a modern collection of glaring white houses and hotels, whose population fluctuates with the seasons. Here is a parade, in summer gay with colour and resounding with those curses of our days, the brass band and the piano-organ, and occasionally the nigger-minstrels' bones. Here are innumerable lodging-houses, carriages and perambulators, and plate-glass windowed shops aflame with gas at night. And the dust and the noise and the glare and the heat are just what seem to attract most people to the place—though whatever the charms of these qualities, it must

always surprise those who happen to dislike them that they should be deemed requisite for relaxation, or even compatible with the peace and quietness which might be thought desirable in a holiday retreat. Out of the season Burnport is a very different place, and can hardly be found fault with on the ground of overliveliness; yet, strange to say, people have been found to prefer it at such times.

The old town is quite different in character: a jumble of red-roofed houses, all old and many ruinous, climbing up the hill-side, no two alike, or rather without arrangement, in narrow, crooked streets. In short, it was picturesque; and like most picturesque things is well worth a visit, provided the visitor has not too keen and delicate a sense of smell. For the narrow streets aforesaid are very dirty, and the place simply reeks of fish fresh and stale, and the stale naturally predominates. On the whole it is very quiet at most times, except when the fishing-boats come in and furl their brown patched sails, and discharge their cargoes on the quay. Then there is plenty of life there at least—what with bringing in the boats, getting out the fish, selling, sorting, and packing them. They sell them by Dutch auction at Burnport; such a sale, though wanting in the excitement of keen competition which belongs to the ordinary

method, has an interest of its own. There is a delightful uncertainty as to your neighbour's intentions—what is the lowest price at which you can be secure of acquiring some lot on which you have set your heart—which, if it were applied to sales where the prices are fixed less by market value than by the fancy of the buyer, would sometimes be maddening. But here the purchasers have keen eyes and shrewd faces. They know the worth of their wares and what they will fetch, so that the issue lies between narrow limits of profit. Yet there is a sufficient element of chance to make the quay at such times a lively and entertaining scene. But when the boats are out, or when there is no business being done, the old town of Burnport is quiet enough. Dirty children play in the gutters, and the scolding of their shrill-voiced mothers—women in fishing towns have harsher voices than anywhere else—alone breaks the silence of the steep paved streets, unless a chance cart rumbles down them behind a heavy clanking horse. Only the artist looks lovingly on the high-pitched, red-tiled roofs, bulging, damp-stained walls, and crazy windows with their little panes patched up with any old rag that comes to hand. They may all be most unpleasant and unwholesome for their inmates, these houses, but they are things of beauty to us, and we

should raise a great outcry if such monuments of antiquity were to give way to glaring new yellow-brick cottages with water-tight roofs, and well-fitting window-frames.

Arnold picked his way slowly up the main street among the decaying refuse that littered it, and the dirty children whose chief object seemed to be to obstruct his steps; pausing now and then to look at some particularly striking bit of half-ruinous building, or to exchange a few remarks on the weather with some ancient mariner in blue jersey and fur cap, with the bowl of his black clay pipe just protruding upside down from his lips, as he loafed at the door of the low-browed tavern. At last he found himself on the outskirts of the town, close to an old and tumble-down church standing in the midst of a quiet little churchyard with the graves of centuries beneath its rank, ill-kept grass. He made his way in, and looked out from his height over the sea where the twilight was beginning already to settle down. Then he wandered among the graves, many of them simple mounds of nameless earth, others with grey, weather-beaten headstones, from which rain and sun and wind had obliterated all trace of their record: mostly uncared for, and with the nettles and wild weeds springing round and over them. Some few were newer and more

legible, and most of these bore sad witness to the ravages of winds and waves. Here was one in memory of John Smith who lost his life at sea after braving its terrors till he had passed the threescore and ten years allotted to man's life : perhaps he would have wished it so, rather than to die in his bed. Another recorded the death of a father and two sons—a whole family—in one storm, and so on. Arnold shuddered and turned away from them. The grey November evening was becoming chilly now that the sun was gone. A white sea-fog was beginning to rise and enfold the heights of the town, and these 'cold *Hic-jacets* of the dead' were depressing. He was glad to get away from them and restore the warmth to his limbs by marching briskly down the hill again, and back to the cheerful light and heat of his hotel. Arrived there he spent an hour or two in writing some letters, and managed by dinner-time to shake off his low spirits.

He was rather late of coming in to *table d'hôte*, and addressed himself immediately to his soup. When that was finished he looked round and took stock of the room and its other occupants. There was a melancholy look about the place, for it was a long room intended to accommodate many times the number of guests it at present held ; and consequently only one

end of it was fully lighted up, and empty chairs seen in a dim light are apt to have a ghostly and uncomfortable appearance. However, the small company present were lively enough. At the end of the table was a family—a mother with two daughters and a son,—who were talking and laughing in a way that showed that they at least did not find Burnport altogether dull. The mother was an active, energetic, almost masculine-looking woman, with steady black eyes and a firm mouth. The children were all very like her, with the same black hair and eyes; but they none of them had her look of strength. Indeed the boy and one of the girls, who were extremely like one another, and might be sixteen and seventeen years old, had clear-cut features and a transparent, colourless complexion which spoke of anything but robust health, though in the girl they produced considerable beauty of a certain order. Not far from them were two maiden ladies of uncertain age, who always seemed to have plenty of gossip to communicate to each other, though they did not look as if their conversation would have very much interest for a third party. As Arnold was criticising these and the few other men and women who made up the party, his next neighbour turned on him an affable smile, and a pair of corkscrew ringlets surmounted by

a nodding erection of lace and ribbons, which may be left for the feminine imagination more fully to picture.

"You're a new arrival at Burnport, I think," she said slowly, in a high-pitched and somewhat tremulous voice.

"A 'dear old thing,'" thought Arnold. "Yes," he said aloud, "I only came here to-day."

"Indeed! I'm afraid you are likely to find it rather dull."

Arnold laughed. "I was just thinking," he said, "that people seemed to be able to find a good deal of amusement in it, though I didn't expect much when I came here."

"Oh yes!" and the 'dear old thing' nodded two or three times, making her grey ringlets shake and those wonderful lilac ribbons in her cap wave to and fro. "There is plenty of amusement for old people who can take it quietly, you know. But we don't often have young men like you here at this time of year; I suppose they hardly know what to do with themselves. It's apt to be so cold at this season, you know, though this year we certainly have had wonderful weather—quite wonderful! So warm and nice!"

"You speak as if you knew the place well," said Arnold.

“Oh yes, I often come here, I’m very fond of Burnport; it’s such a nice, quiet place out of the season. And one gets to know so many people here, and they’re such a superior class, you know. I know the clergyman of the parish very well; he’s such a dear old man, and preaches so nicely. You really should hear him. Do you stay here long?”

“Some time, I expect,” said Arnold.

“You see,” said the old lady, “my doctor always advises me to come here—perhaps that’s because he knows I’m so fond of it, though. I suffer terribly from gout, you know; but I never feel it here. Do you know,” she continued, “I don’t know why it is, but all the doctors are recommending whisky for gout now. I always take a little of it at dinner now, and I find it does me all the good in the world.”

Arnold smiled, and could not help wondering maliciously whether there was the same reason for this recommendation—that the doctors knew their patients were so fond of it. However, he felt that in this case the suggestion was uncalled for.

“I suppose,” he said, changing the subject, after a pause, “there is plenty of boating and fishing to be had here? I saw a lot of unused sailing boats down on the shore to-day, and there were men loafing about, and very anxious that I should take a sail.”

“Oh yes, if you’re a good sailor and all that sort of thing, and don’t mind a little tossing about, you know—for you who are young and strong it doesn’t matter; but we don’t always have such fine weather as this, and the sea is very rough sometimes at this time of year. I never go on the sea myself; there are so many many pretty walks all round here, and quite in reach. Of course it’s not as nice as it is in summer for that; but I can always find plenty to see.”

“You don’t tire of taking the same walk always?” said Arnold. “Don’t you ever feel that you would like a little variety?”

The old lady laughed and shook her head again, making the corkscrew ringlets and lilac ribbons bob up and down as if they appreciated and joined in her amusement.

“Oh dear no!” she said, “when you’ve lived as long as I have you’ll find the old things that you’ve seen all your life the most entertaining. It’s only young folks like you that are always in want of some new experience. We old people know that there’s nothing so new as the old things. I should be quite happy with one walk all the rest of my days, if it was a pretty one.”

It was Arnold’s turn to laugh now. “That sounds very philosophical,” he said. But he felt that there was such a thing as having too

much of novelty, and envied the peaceful habit of mind which was free from the craving he himself felt for change and variety.

“Of course,” continued the old lady, “it’s quite right to get as much enjoyment out of life as you can, while you’re young and strong, and can enjoy it. But when you can’t get about easily, and must take things quietly, it’s a great blessing, as you’ll find some day, to be able to put up with it, and be just as happy after all. It makes it so easy to trust in Providence.”

Arnold thought to himself rather bitterly that ‘Providence’ generally means ‘Providence for me.’ Why should the comparison of a mass of misery with a few grains of happiness induce a greater trust in Providence, unless because every man is to himself the centre of the universe? However, he kept his thoughts to himself, farther reflecting that this old lady really had a Providence to be thankful to, if it was nothing but her own contented spirit. When she began talking to him he had been merely amused at her quaint appearance and way of talking; but afterwards, as he lit his cigar in the smoking-room, he bethought him of those probably very self-satisfied and Pharisaical persons who came to scoff and remained to pray. And he felt that he had learned one lesson that evening.

CHAPTER IX.

EAST RISE.

“ From women’s eyes this doctrine I derive :
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire ;
They are the books, the arts, the Academes
That show, contain, and nourish all the world.”

Love’s Labour’s Lost.

A MAN who has no eye for beauty is necessarily uncouth, be he never so crammed with the learning of abstract sciences and books. We are accustomed to regard with abhorrence the conduct of the rustic who, when his path was crossed by a harmless, necessary toad, expressed his unreasoning spite against Nature’s handiwork by taking a clumsy jump into the air and coming down hobnailed on the hapless offender, with the remark, “ I’ll larn thee to be a twoäd.” The contempt bred by familiarity with such objects in his case is probably too outrageous not to sicken any one but an agricultural hind ; but it is scarcely ‘ contrary to experience ’ that quite

cultured persons should display an indifference only less brutal.

Arnold hated what he called, perhaps a little unjustly, the 'natural science spirit' with a Vatinian hatred. When he admired a thing, a landscape, a picture, or a poem, he did not wish to be forced to analyse the feeling down to the elements which composed it. In the case of artistic workmanship it doubtless contributes to the enjoyment of the effect to know to some extent how it is produced. But even that knowledge would be dearly bought at the price of being unintermittently conscious of the mechanism underneath, the metallic pulse that beats inside the greatest of human creations, preventing them from seeming aught but life-like counterfeits, only to be called alive by some magnificent hyperbole.

The society of people imbued with such a spirit always worked a speedy reaction in Robur, and made him long for countrified simplicity with all its faults. At any rate Nature, wide ruling through the empire of earth and sea and sky, the Universal Mother who embraces tiny man, and is not embraced of him,—She cannot be explained away on the leather-and-prunella hypothesis. So thought our hero as he strolled down to the beach for a sail. Few amusements had so much charm for him as this newly

discovered occupation. He was an excellent sailor, and under the experienced tuition of an ancient mariner, was fast learning the secrets of tacking skilfully, and so to manage the little craft which he had hired, as to keep clear of the dangers of that coast.

On this particular morning there was a considerable wind blowing, quite enough, in fact, to fill a good-sized hat, if it belonged to a landsman. The sea was running high, so the crew gave up all thoughts of fishing that day. Now flying cheerily before the wind, which all the while pursued unmercifully, now breasting the waves almost in its teeth, they drank in the brave blast through all their pores, until very hunger compelled them to put back to shore. Arnold was the only pleasure-seeker who had ventured to mock Father Neptune's rough mood, and as they neared the landing a small crowd began to collect on the edge of the parade above to watch them disembark.

"Look alive, mates," shouted the old salt from the bows, as he threw the coil of rope to his confederates in the surf.

Just at this moment Arnold, whose eyes had wandered to the knot of spectators, caught sight of a face looking straight at him which produced in him so sudden and exquisite a thrill that he immediately forgot what he was doing; though

he should have been ready to jump into the water to haul the vessel up. But the boat settled that for him as she grounded, by tumbling him overboard unceremoniously, to the huge delight of the spectators. However, he scrambled ashore, laughing and dripping; but none the worse.

His first thought was to look for the unconscious cause of his ducking. There she stood, a little apart from the others, evidently a good deal amused at the incident, to judge from the smile which parted her lips. Arnold looked at the tall, firm figure with its fresh glory of grace and strength, the plain black dress, the glow of health in the delicate cheek.

“What a picture!” he mused. “How I wish I were a real sailor, and not a land-lubbering amateur! A jolly day’s work on the briny, and then to come home and lay the nets and lobster-pots at the feet of a lass like that. But I’m a fool, and she’s an empress.”

So he wiped the salt out of his eyes, and jogged back to the hotel humming the “three fishers,” and carrying his heavy clothes with a light heart.

If one wants to see much of a particular person, it is remarkable with what frequency the desire is accomplished. Whether by accident or premeditation, it is certain that scarcely a day

passed without giving Arnold a glimpse of the charmer before whom he had made so undignified a first appearance. There is reason to believe, however, that he was not wholly guiltless in the matter, as his devotion to the sea-wall and parade began immediately after breakfast, 'and lasted unremittingly till evening. Such vigilance could not remain long unrewarded, and the young lady's admirer soon made a few idle discoveries about her, without obtruding himself upon her attention, or in any way putting her modesty to the blush. Though he abstained from enshrining the merits of her locks and eyebrows within the severe technical compass of sonnet or ode, it was not from any unworthiness in the subject. The hair that escaped beneath the simple hat she wore was in colour of that happy mean—scarcely to be called golden—which lies between auburn on the one hand and flaxen on the other, and is very distinct from either; a complexion similar to that which may be supposed to have prevailed among the Teuton hordes whose bodies fertilised the plain of Aix. For the maid's eyebrows bounteous Nature had used a slightly darker shade, and set them to grace eyes grey as those of the Olympian spouse of Zeus; eyes at once keen and tender, capable of taking the colour from whatsoever object they rested upon and felt with, yet not so as to abdicate their own

imperial originality. She was never alone, but Arnold hardly noticed her companions—friends, perhaps, or servants. Sometimes she was accompanied besides by two well-trained but frolicsome fox-terriers. Whenever he passed her she was always chatting eagerly, and was evidently full of energy and humour. A sketching portfolio would not unfrequently appear under her arm, and Arnold concluded from this that she attended the School of Art, a flourishing institution at Burnport. An active gait, with rather a long step for a woman, gave her an air of purpose, so different from the desultory loiter and invalidism of other individuals of her own sex and age, and crowned her attractions.

It is a hard thing to have to say, but from all this sweet wholesomeness and common-sense Arnold inferred that she had lost her mother early in life ; and the supposition was supported by the quiet black dress which she invariably wore. Maternal influence cannot be overrated, and it is just for this reason that when it is bad it is so hopelessly pernicious. From the day when Rebekah tampered with her son Jacob how often has not the injunction, “Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee,” brought misery to the children who have been forced to comply with it ? And yet in modern times, at least, the evil influence

of the mother with the sons is almost beneficial compared to its effects upon the daughters. Their position of tutelage is not so soon, if ever, impaired as it now is in the case of their brothers; they depend almost entirely upon their mother, who in nine cases out of ten must be positively unfit to discharge her responsibility. The proper performance of the most difficult of social functions is not a matter of instinct, even if the flighty matrons who carelessly undertake it could lay claim to any useful development of that faculty. Wild and exuberant affection is common to all animals who are parents, and is a pretty sight enough; but is there to be no difference in its manifestation between the cat and the cat's mistress? What is the period of engagement between a young couple for? It cannot be to prepare for the mere procreation of offspring and subsequent maintenance of their bodily temperature; that is mainly a question of pounds, shillings, and pence. And yet the sweethearts can think of nothing but themselves for months, or even years, before they are finally wedded. The union which is to call new generations of human souls into existence is seldom sanctified by the least forethought for the happiness of a potential progeny whose being is so often at the mercy of the parents' whim. The man has no time to think of such things, he must work for his liveli-

hood; the maid has become wedded to her mother's teaching and traditions before she is allowed to receive the addresses of a man, and she is powerless to unmake herself when the troth is plighted.

This is not the worship of sacred Love, but a grovelling affectation, a gross faith in fabricated allurements for entrapping wealthy lovers, a superstition of tight-lacing, which cramps the soul not less than its casket, before the novice may be initiated, and take part in the rites of "the Moloch of maternal vanity." May the swindled votaries of that gloomy creed be treated to stale denunciations of their practises at the hands of authors and moralists till the error is confessed, and Pudicitia returns to earth.

Arnold gave himself up completely to the fascination of this fair young creature, but he did not run risk of embarrassment by following her about. Thus he remained voluntarily ignorant of where she lived, and consulted no list for the purpose of ascertaining her name. From the circumstance of the Art School, as well as from other slight indications, he judged her to be a resident in the place, or at least to be making a prolonged stay at Burnport. It was pleasant to see her about; and he allowed what must be nothing but a transient vision of delight to entwine itself with a too obstinate intricacy in

the texture of his life during those brief days. After all, was he not soon to return to Oakleigh, and go on living in the old way among the folks at home? The thought troubled him whenever it arose; but he put it away with blind determination, resolved to enjoy the spell while it lasted at all costs.

He had received a letter from Mr. Dalton soon after his arrival at the seaside, but had put it in his pocket without much heeding the contents. One day, however, he suddenly remembered that it had asked him to call upon two maiden ladies who lived at Burnport, and with whom Grace had gone to school at Brighton in former years. He found the letter again, and read it over. The Misses Blunsden, it seemed, had retired from their profession, and were now living at their ease on the little portion they had scraped together for themselves. They had taken a house in another watering-place, not being able to tear themselves from the sea which had grown to form part of their idea of home. Mr. Dalton added that he had written to acquaint them with the proximity of his old ward, and was sure that they would pay him every attention if he would compliment them by a visit. "They seem to be a very estimable pair of old ladies, and Grace was very fond of them," he concluded.

"Heigh-ho," sighed Arnold, as he folded up

the letter ; “ my guardian angel in spectacles and a black coat has not lost his hold upon me yet, I see. I’ll go and accept the worst these old ladies can do for me this afternoon.”

East Rise was the name of a gentle ascent at right angles to the parade. The houses built at intervals upon this slope looked as if they were climbing up-stairs in order to get a good view of the sea over each other’s heads. The wand of some enchanter having defeated this project by turning them to stone or stucco where they stood, they all had to make the best of it, and remain contented with their present situations, though only a few had reached the coveted altitude. A similar eminence opposite was called West Rise, and between them was a little glen which had been converted into a public garden accessible from the roads on each side by rude steps and a steep path. Where the roads joined at either end, and became one, there were other entrances more worthy the dignity of a municipal pleasure-ground. It was tastefully laid out, the turf being carefully fenced in to prevent it from being downtrodden and spoiled ; the pond with its water-lilies, and little colony of ducks and swans,—quite a miniature Serpentine—was also protected with railings. The place was so sheltered that a good many flowers were blooming even at that season ; there were shrubberies, and summer-

houses, and retired corners provided with seats, not to mention an old-fashioned yew maze at the farther end up the hill. The single row of houses on each side would have had an uninterrupted view of each other as well as the garden below, had it not been for the trees which shot up into the air from the banks, forming a sufficient barrier between East and West, in spite of their denuded state.

Arnold learned upon inquiry that Miss Blunsden and her sister inhabited a picturesque little house near the summit of East Rise, and he delayed no longer to make himself acquainted with its interior.

Both ladies were in the drawing-room, and rose to meet him. One of them who was rather tall and gaunt, and looked the elder, though she was not so in reality, had been reading the paper aloud, and still wore a somewhat masculine pair of eye-glasses on the end of her nose. The other had a frame of embroidery on a small table in front of her, and was evidently engaged upon some matter of ecclesiastical drapery.

She had a smooth, unwrinkled face, and her smile of greeting disclosed a perfect set of teeth. Arnold thought he had seldom seen so sweet an expression.

“We are very glad indeed to know you, Mr. Robur; any friend of our dear Mrs. Dalton

would be welcome here, would he not, Joanna dearest?" Miss Blunsden and Mrs. Dalton, though their acquaintance was but slight, had managed evidently to conceive a warm regard for each other.

The lady to whom appeal was made breathed upon her glasses preparatory to polishing them with her pocket-handkerchief, and replied: "Of course he would, Hilda; take a seat, Mr. Robur, and tell us all about Grace."

Arnold willingly complied, pitying that young lady rather for ever having been at the orders of such a Tartar as Miss Joanna appeared to be. They were much interested with all he had to tell them, and frequently interrupted him with all sorts of sharp little questions. Whenever he had occasion to mention Mrs. Dalton's name he observed that it had an effect, though a different one, on both his hearers. Miss Blunsden's smile waxed sweeter, while her sister's evinced a tendency to grimness. He thought of the embroidery; it did not seem improbable that Miss Hilda and Mrs. Dalton had found common ground in Church matters.

"It must be five years since Grace left us," said the elder lady, taking up a skein of silk. "She was seventeen, and went abroad to finish. She was such a sweet girl, but never very strong; do you consider her stronger now, Mr. Robur?"

Arnold replied that he believed she was in the enjoyment of tolerably good health ; he had been away lately, and had not much opportunity of knowing.

“ We have often heard from Grace since she left,” said Miss Joanna ; “ she was a nice, unruly little thing when she came to us. I suppose she wouldn’t care to toss her bonnet into the sea, and try to run in after it now, but she did so almost the first time I took her out at Brighton. ‘ You must ask your father’s consent before you go throwing his money away like that, child,’ I remember saying to her. For my part, I like boys and girls to have something a little stronger than water in their veins,” she added with a short laugh ; “ but Grace got prim and proper afterwards.”

Miss Hilda opened her eyes very wide. “ Why, you never breathed a word of it to me, Joanna dearest. I’m positive I never heard about the bonnet till this minute.”

“ No doubt,” was the dry rejoinder ; “ you did not have to take the children out, and there was no occasion to bother you about it. You would have never left off fretting yourself if you had known all your young ladies did when they were out for their walks.”

“ Yes,” observed the fair embroiderer, after murmuring her surprise at her junior’s audacious

defiance of principle in concealing these things ; “ we are glad to get away from Brighton and settle down in a place where there is less respectability.”

“ Good gracious, Hilda ! Surely you don’t mean in proportion to the population ? I won’t hear Burnport libelled.”

“ My dear Joanna, you are a Philistine. Mr. Robur will understand me, if you cannot. Do not you hate respectability, Mr. Robur ? ”

“ Well—er—that rather depends on what you mean by the word.”

Miss Hilda’s questions had a way of making one feel awkward.

“ Exactly,” cried she triumphantly ; “ I see you fall in with my views entirely. Just so ; I knew you would.”

“ If,” said Arnold, making an effort to deceive Miss Joanna, “ you mean simply honest and unpretending mediocrity, I’m afraid I do not agree with you. But when folks are mediocre, and plume themselves on it, they are apt to become offensive.”

“ A good answer,” said Miss Joanna, darting a frown at her tranquil sister. The latter smiled composedly.

“ I am glad you can agree with me now, my dear. Mr. Robur, you don’t know what an obligation you’ve laid upon me in making Joanna

see the truth of my little remark. If she ever happens to forget it, I shall remind her that she has herself heard you give me your authority."

The object of this rebuke was amused, and gave Arnold a sly look as much as to say, "You'll know her soon as well as I do."

"Your estate is near the Daltons', isn't it, Mr. Robur? Can you get up a strong interest in pigs and poultry, or in competing with your neighbours for having the biggest cattle and cauliflowers?"

"Landowning is, indeed, my occupation, Miss Blunsden; but I hope you won't be hard upon me for saying that, much as I like to see my place full of animals and vegetables, my practical knowledge of such matters amounts to just nothing at all."

"For shame, Mr. Robur, you must not neglect your duties like that; I declare it's as bad as being an absentee landlord."

"Joanna, you dear dreadful Radical, leave poor Mr. Robur alone; anyone can see, you impetuous creature, that he has not had time yet to look into all these things since he returned to live at his home."

The fiery Joanna acknowledging that there might be some truth in this, Miss Hilda exhorted Arnold to accept her apology, and went on to observe that a landlord could be a very good

man, and yet have interests nearer to his heart than farming. Arnold thanked her for this piece of liberality, and admitted that it was so in his own case ; there were a few tenants on his land, and he was glad to say their wants had not been left entirely without his personal supervision.

“Not that the condition in which my guardian handed them over to me stood in any need of reform,” he added. “But I thought it well to mingle with them, not having too many companions of my own ; and so I know all the families pretty well by this time.”

“Then,” said Miss Hilda, beaming upon the young man, “you are fond of the poor, Mr. Robur.”

“No fonder of them than of the rich, as long as there is nothing against the latter but their wealth,” laughed he. “You see, it was a mere accident that I was thrown up against them, and there was no choice left me in the matter. I am not in the least anxious to divide my property into allotments for the behoof of my poor friends, and content myself with two or three acres of it like the rest. Perhaps that will make you change your blessing into a curse, Miss Blunsden.”

“It is now my turn to say for shame, Mr. Robur. But I must take the liberty to doubt your sincerity just a little bit. Please don’t fidget, Joanna dearest,” for that lady seemed

about to relieve her mind. "I am sure you do yourself an injustice," she continued, "when you talk as if you thought the poor did not deserve more consideration from us than the rich. Do you not sympathise with missions in overcrowded towns? Surely the parish priest ought to be found in humble cottages rather than at groaning tables in great houses?"

"Not if the rich were as numerous as the poor," observed Miss Joanna, with uncompromising gruffness.

"My dear Joanna, if you can't see the point, pray be quiet," replied her sister with mild superiority. "When we came here, Mr. Robur, a great spiritual need for something of the sort had long been felt, but nobody knew how to supply it. The Guild of St. Guthlac has, however, now been formed; and its members, in consideration, I suppose, of my public services, have elected me as their first Mother Superior. We are all ladies, you know, except the curate, who is chaplain to the Guild. Our object is to try and create some religious enthusiasm among the poor women of our parish, and restore something of that sweet devotion which prompts the lowest classes of the Roman towns on the continent to decorate their churches and homes with candles and little paper ornaments at the Feasts."

On Arnold inquiring what means were being adopted to further that end, Miss Blunsden informed him that the chief instrument in this important reform was at present the art of embroidery. It appeared that the whole Guild was employed upon a complete set of vestments and hangings, including a variety of changes of raiment that was quite bewildering. The work upon the frame was a design for a single square of the festal altar-cloth which was to make memorable the anniversary of St. Guthlac's day, and the whole of the succeeding octave. It represented a sort of medallion with the head and shoulders of the saint. Arnold was forced to praise the workmanship, so much of it as was completed; but in his heart he did not consider the portrait a flattering one, and sincerely hoped that the countenance of the "blessed original" had been less blotchy in life, both for his own happiness and that of his flock.

"When we have completed all these pious exercises," said the Mother Superior, replacing the tissue-paper over her patron's visage, "we shall of course have to find some other method of feeding souls; but this will occupy our diligent fingers for some time, and no doubt things will be made clear to us as we go along."

Arnold devoutly hoped they would. It seemed to him that Miss Hilda must spend a considerable

sum per annum upon gratifying her hobby. However, he did not feel called upon to offer a contribution, and soon rose to go.

“Joanna might like to ask you to take part in her Sunday school while you are here, only she’s asleep.” Arnold glanced towards the slumbering Joanna, and implored Miss Hilda not to disturb her on his account. But the mischief was done, and the glasses were picked up from the floor, and put on her nose, to enable their owner to have another good look at Arnold as she said good-bye. Apparently she had heard nothing of her sister’s hint about the school, for she said not a word of it.

“Let me see,” said Miss Hilda, as she gave Arnold her hand, “to-day is Tuesday ; can you dine with us on Thursday evening ?”

The invitation was accepted, and Arnold left the house.

As he walked down the hill he could not help thinking how much more interesting the sisters had been than he expected to find them. The elder one, with her gentle voice and manner softening down her inconsequent argumentativeness, was an agreeable study. He fancied he should like the odd, downright Joanna more, though, when he got to know them better. Her shrewd, crisp way of saying things pleased him, and harmonised with his bent. If we cannot

have both good wine and a good vessel, let us at least have the good wine. Some people think claret tastes better out of a black bottle than when it has been transferred to a cut-glass decanter. Perhaps Arnold was not of that opinion; but he could be none the worse for being reminded sometimes that divine possibilities may be shrouded beneath a matter-of-fact exterior. Moreover, is not beauty a relative and an arbitrary quality? We can even educate ourselves to admire what we know to be good. "Beauty fades fast, pigskin will last," says the proverb; *argal*, pigskin is not without a beauty of its own, if we could but see it.

Turning the corner into the parade he found himself to his confusion within a foot of the incarnate refutation of the truisms with which his mind had just been busy. Had a division been taken on the question at that moment, he would have unhesitatingly voted against himself,—himself, that is, as he was while the corner still intervened. So often is the difference between denial and assent a thing of inches, a span, a hairbreadth.

It was fortunate that he had paid his call that afternoon; for when he got back he found a letter from Mrs. Dalton inquiring whether he had yet seen "those old darlings, the Miss Blunsdens." He was able to sit down at once,

and reply in the affirmative, describing his impressions while they were still fresh. This he did with all the circumspection necessary in dealing with his correspondent; for it is a dangerous thing to commit oneself to a person who never misses the opportunity for an act of imprudence. There was one passage in the letter upon which Arnold was unable to satisfy the lady's curiosity; it ran thus:—

“Grace wants to know if they have still got their niece with them; she was about Grace's own age, I suppose.”

There certainly was a piano in the room, thought Arnold; but that may very well be nothing but a medium for Miss Hilda's Gregorians during especially severe attacks of ritualistic afflatus. No; he had not noted any conclusive evidence of the existence of a niece in the house on East Rise, nor had the sisters mentioned her, he was sure of that. So he inserted a clause to that effect, and fastened up the envelope for the post.

A day spent almost entirely without exercise in the open air did not agree with Arnold, and that night he got very little sleep. Once he threw himself out of bed impatiently, and drew back the curtains to look out at the night. The moon was bright enough to read by; it shone coldly on the deserted beach, and the sails of

herring-boats scattered here and there in the distance. The cold air roused him. "This is bad, very bad," he muttered, as he rushed back to bed, and buried himself under the blankets. After that he fell into a heavy doze, and dreamed that he dined with Miss Hilda, and Mrs. Dalton was there. Miss Joanna did not sit down to the table, but waited upon the company disguised in a ritualistic tail-coat and shovel hat. The first course consisted of a shoal of herrings, and Miss Hilda insisted on helping him to several dozen at once. They were very fresh, and not thoroughly cooked ; and as they would not proceed with the meal before he had eaten every one, he was forced to gorge silently while the others talked, and was nearly choked by the time his plate was removed. A huge dish made its appearance next upon the table,—Arnold could not see how it got there,—and Mrs. Dalton said, "Now comes the surprise." All efforts to remove the cover were, however, in vain ; and Arnold was standing up and had just begun to tug away at it, the others holding down the dish, when—he awoke.

CHAPTER X.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

“Oons! here to meet some lion-headed fellow, I warrant, with his damned double-barrelled swords and cut-and-thrust pistols!—Lord bless us, it makes me tremble to think o’t!—These be such desperate bloody-minded weapons! Well, I never could abide ’em—from a child I never could fancy ’em!—I suppose there an’t been so merciless a beast in the world as your loaded pistol!”—*The Rivals*.

ONE morning the post brought much disquiet to Mrs. Marchpane’s tranquil spirit. Not that the plain Burnport postmark on the envelope stood as a decoy for anything of an explosive nature in the contents, but it was clear to Joshua Gibbins when he came in shortly afterwards that something was harassing the good lady’s mind, and with characteristic pessimism he instantly prepared for the worst.

“What do you think I’ve heard from Mr. Arnold about, Joshua?” He was right, then; a month of unmitigated happiness could not go by without some compensating misfortune

to show for it. Smothering his natural exultation at having prognosticated events with so much judgment, he replied—

“Shouldn’t be s’prised, now, to hear he’d broke his legs—If it ain’t his neck, mum,” he added with a brightening aspect, as he saw his mistake. Even the penetrating Gibbins failed to perceive the incongruity of a person with a dislocated *medulla oblongata* writing to acquaint his housekeeper with the distressing fact. Such is the fallibility of human intellect.

“La, Joshua, whatever made you think of that? To hear you, a body might think you wished it to happen.”

“Well, I won’t be sayin’ as I don’t, mum,” he rejoined, in a tone of sepulchral resignation. “Somethink’s sure to happen to him one o’ these days when he’s a gally-wantin’ about, and enjoyin’ of hisself; and the sooner it comes the sooner mended, says I.”

The old Greek spirit lived again in Joshua Gibbins, though it might seem scarcely recognisable at first sight. Overweening success was his bugbear; and he now felt himself to be in the same predicament as the monarch who had his ring returned to him from the sea into which he had cast it to appease the jealousy of heaven.

“It does make one feel as though there couldn’t be a brighter side nohow,” he murmured, in his

disappointment at learning that Arnold's prosperity continued as yet undiminished.

Mrs. Marchpane was half alarmed by his persistence.

"What makes you think anything's going to happen to the dear young gentleman, Joshua?" she inquired.

But the seer could only evasively reply to this by remarking, "Well, it keeps going on a-delayin', and delayin', such a time that when it does come I reckon it'll be pretty 'ard to bear, that's all."

"It isn't much, anyhow," said the housekeeper. "I declare you're just like the man in the Scriptures who was always making honest people uncomfortable by prophesying something unpleasant; I've no patience with you."

"I b'lieve it come to pass, mum, jest the same, whether they liked it or not," was the provoking repartee.

"None the faster for his talking about it, though." Mrs. Marchpane was nettled by his unexpected pugnacity. "The noosepapers are always saying there's going to be a war somewhere or other,—at least, they used to when I read 'em, for I've given 'em up long ago. But catch them telling about the peace and happiness that's everywhere; they don't ever think o' that."

Mr. Gibbins was understood to deliver himself

of the opinion that this was an essentially feminine view, though not, it would appear, upon that account a good one.

“I don’t say there’s anythink agin ’em,” he went on, alluding to the frail sex, “’cept just one leetle hindiscretion ; they allus want to think favourably o’ things, and take ’em on trust. Nat’rally they gets disappointed pretty often.”

“Yes, they do take things on trust, as you say, Joshua ; and bless their hearts for it. I wouldn’t be a man to go holding goods up to the light, and getting ’em as bargains on account of the flaws. Why you ain’t content, however cheap you got a thing, if you know it’s rubbish.”

Mrs. Marchpane’s honour having been satisfied by this attack on the enemy’s camp, she imparted the information, by way of changing the subject, that someone was coming from Copesbury to catalogue the books, and that he would probably stay in the house over two or three nights.

“What’s he want with the books, then ? Master ain’t goin’ to sell ’em, surely ?”

“Sell them ! Whoever talked of ‘selling’ ? Why, he only wants a list made out, so as he may know what he’s got from what he hasn’t.”

“’Sorter takin’ stock ; eh, mum ?”

“That’s it. And he says you’re to look after the man and make him comfortable. He’ll smoke

his pipe with you downstairs of an evening, and he can have that little room in the passage upstairs to sleep in."

"Right you are, mum ; I'll attend to the chap, rest upon me."

Arnold kept no other man-servant in the house, so Gibbins occupied melancholy bachelor quarters in the basement. When offered a cottage he had declined, preferring his two rooms, to which he had grown as much accustomed as the mice in their wainscotes. Many must have been the profound confidences entrusted to these walls by their philosophic tenant ; for Gibbins, though possessed by one idea, had but few words to put it in, and found the chief vent for his wit and wisdom in soliloquising, undisturbed by animate creation. Not that he held each representative of the latter class to be equally untrustworthy. A varying degree of reticence among animals was to him a thing undoubted. He would maintain that the domestic cat carried off the palm in this respect, and that a place could be assigned to every other species on the graduated scale between the feline at the top and the human at the bottom of the ladder. In this system vermin and insects did not count, being creatures simply designed to destroy and be destroyed, and without a claim to consideration on any other ground. Still, he could never

quite throw off his reserve before even a cat. The real sweets of intimacy were only to be enjoyed in what some silly folks call solitude (much they know about it !) between four walls. The companions with ears but no mouths were the ones for him. There was no danger of wearying *them* with continual repetition, and always harping on the same string ; and this was held by some of his human associates to be not the least of Mr. Gibbins' failings. Walls will vibrate just as cheerfully to the old string as to a new one,—indeed a certain amount of iteration seems necessary to make them vibrate at all sympathetically. Besides, even should they feel surfeited by so much solo music, they are too grave and decorous to show it.

Descending to his den, Joshua carefully closed the door preparatory to unburdening his mind of a kind of appendix or excursus in further elucidation of the subject which had just received such insufficient ventilation upstairs.

“I doubt some mischief 'll come o' this 'ere messin' with the books,” he grumbled. “What's a man want a-numberin' of his goods for, I should like to know, till 'e's got to die and leave 'em?”

Mr. Gibbins, it will be perceived, considered it to be just as bad to count chickens after they are hatched as before ; or rather, the former operation was in his sight the more pernicious of the two.

Had he been the founder of a sect, his followers would have been free to speculate on possibilities to any extent, so long as they 'dutifully shut their eyes to facts,—a characteristic which generally connects the most opposite sets of opinions.

Deep in one of those ethical problems which are always recurring to active minds, he went on meditatively.

"If them books was to be counted wrong, now; how'd that be? Seems to me the brighter side o' things might come uppermost then, arter all;" and he rubbed his chin slowly with his coat-sleeve for a minute, pondering the matter. "That's it," he resumed; brightening as if with the result of this inspiring process, "I'll jest go up afore that chap comes, and get one or two o' those books,—little 'uns, you know." (This with a confidential nod towards the listening walls.) "I can stow 'em away safe down here some'ers, and then 'tothers won't count right. Arterwards, when he's gone, back I takes 'em agin, and stuffs 'em in behind the big 'uns, so as nobody won't see no diff'rence. Ah, what a thing it is to hev a 'ead to rest upon." Here he shook the appendage in question, and chuckled complacently. "*She* wouldn't 'a thought o' that, for all she's such a sharp 'un. How I should like to tell her about it, and see what she'd say!

But I dursn't do it; no, no; why, she might up'n say she fust put it in my head, like; aye, and prove it too; that 'ud come easy enough, I lay, with that tongue of hers. No, I don't want no talk about it; so onsettling. Else she might d'ny it warn't no use. Well, I know better'n that."

Further introspection seeming to add no fresh result, this honest Jesuit rose to carry out his dark purpose, and it was barely executed before the excellent bookseller, bearing a capacious carpet-bag, made his appearance on the scene.

No juncture could have been more favourable than that at which he had offered his services to Arnold. His letter, stating the time when he would be free to undertake the work, had been forwarded to Burnport, and a reply accepting his offer had arrived from that place only two days before. Upon its receipt he had written immediately to Edwards, informing him that all necessity for keeping himself in the background had been providentially removed, as the coast was now clear, and there could be no danger of his being recognised.

"Get leave of absence from your governor for a couple of days," he had concluded, "and come down to nose round for yourself. I am to sleep in the house, and you can easily put up within reach at the inn."

The news was extremely gratifying to his correspondent, and the necessary alterations in Edwards' plans were soon made. He was prepared to hear of Arnold's absence, being one of those generally lucky persons for whom Gibbins would have prophesied a calamitous future. Nevertheless he regarded it as a fortunate coincidence that he would now be able to see that Rock played him no tricks, for mutual confidence was scarcely a marked feature of their partnership, old as it was. He therefore determined to personate the bookseller's assistant by the aid of his oldest clothes, and a second-hand wide-awake, and announced his intention of arriving at Oakleigh the day after his supposed master had been installed in the library.

That accomplished diplomatist succeeded at once in making a favourable impression on Mrs. Marchpane. When asked if he preferred to take his meals alone, or in the housekeeper's room in company with its fair occupant and Mr. Gibbins, he begged with the most unaffected politeness to be allowed to accept the latter alternative.

"Company, ma'am," he added in a graceful apology, "confers a zest which even the costliest viands can ill afford to lack. I would rather dine at the humblest board with my equals,—for I am but a poor man myself,—than surrounded

by solitary grandeur in the glittering palaces of opulent nobility."

"So prettily put," thought the simple old lady to whom this grandiloquence was addressed; "quite free and open, and so gentlemanlike with it all!"

And then the repast to which they all three sat down! Just the same plain, cosy meal that was served every evening in that room; but it tasted twice as good as usual owing to the conversation of the new-comer, and lasted twice as long too. Though he seemed to talk the whole time, Mr. Rock managed to get his share of the good things; in fact he eat as much as the other two put together, for he was able to bolt something every now and then between his sentences, while his hearers' mouths remained empty as well as open through the greater part of his thrilling series of autobiographical sketches.

Mrs. Marchpane's curiosity regarding the private affairs of great people above her was no less keen than that of many other good folks in her station. It may have been a weakness; but it was at any rate amiable and disinterested. No one—not even Gibbins in his most jaundiced moments—would have dreamed of calling the simple woman a snob;—or rather, Gibbins might have done so, for he was completely ignorant what the word meant, and the proportion of such

words to the rest of his vocabulary was certainly not inconsiderable. Fortunately there are numbers of men and women who strongly resemble the housekeeper of Oakleigh in the genuine concern they feel for matters too high to disturb them at all seriously—matters chronicled with stern bareness of detail in ‘Fashionable Intelligence’ columns. They are troubled by no desire to ape the performances of a class distinct from themselves,—a temptation reserved almost exclusively for the intermediate group in the social system, and having nothing to do with this unpretentious set of people. Nor will we blame them—we who are more sophisticated, and know how to repress the wonder we really feel,—for their harmless delight in the Court news, their accurate acquaintance with the Christian names in full of each member of the royal family, and their childlike fondness for shows, even to the village wedding or funeral; for all these things have a significance of their own, and, perhaps, after all, are quite good enough for ordinary flesh and blood.

Hiram’s personal recollections growing more remarkable as the victuals before him disappeared, Mrs. Marchpane was constrained to lay down her knife and fork and take long breaths at more frequent intervals, so that when the men retired to Gibbins’ quarters for a smoke she

began to feel that her mental repletion had been attained at considerable expense to her physical needs.

"Sakes alive!" she exclaimed to Rhoda Dandrum, "how hungry all this talking do make one. Such an evening as we've had here; I don't remember the like of it these twenty year."

Alone with the taciturn Joshua Mr. Rock proceeded to bait his hook somewhat differently. He was not quite certain of the bailiff, and sat silently puffing in the hope that his phlegmatic host would disclose himself in time. It was pain and grief to him to restrain his rattling tongue, but his wary self-denial triumphed in the end, and restored him once more to his element.

The habit of spending the greater part of his evenings alone was answerable for a way the bailiff had of closing his eyes when he sat down before the fire, and this again produced, if not slumber, at least strange absence of mind, and oblivion of external circumstances. Thus it was that at the end of half an hour, during which no word had fallen from his guest, he forgot the exceptional nature of the occasion, and was betrayed into remarking, with the pipe-stem between his teeth, "Well, she likes a laugh, and she's had it to-night, no mistake."

Mr. Rock still saying nothing, Joshua fell deeper into the snare, and went on sternly:—

“Now what I says is ‘laugh to-day and you’ll cry to-morrow; whereas life ’ll go round as smooth as clockwork if so be as you keeps ser’us and takes it quiet and respectable.’ Look at me; ’ere hev I bin lyin’ in the lap o’ luxury, as they say, ever such a time. I sits here in comfort when I’m tired with goin’ about the place all day, no hanxieties to hagitate, no hadwersity to shake me up, inardly or otherwise. Why ain’t things diff’rent, why am I better off nor most men?”——

“Because you’ve got a head on your shoulders, sir,” interposed a bland voice at his elbow; “because you stick to business, and have no time to waste over nonsense; because it’s mighty easy to play the fool, but to become wise is a different matter. No, sir; wisdom’s no joke, don’t you believe it,” and the speaker nodded and frowned impressively.

Mr. Gibbins’ orbs were extended to their utmost by this time. To hear his thoughts read for him at his own hearth by another person, and that person a stranger, was a novel experience for him. Had the sentiments of this amiable bookseller been less in accordance with his own, he would probably have held his tongue from that moment till bed-time. As it was, however, he instantly detected a warm sympathy between this man and himself, and hailed the discovery

with all the eagerness of which he was capable. It was all done in a flash. Like the two long-separated brothers of familiar domestic tragedy they had rushed into each other's arms (metaphorically speaking) after an identification too sudden to be altogether convincing, and an intimacy of the conjuror's hat description sprang up between them in a moment.

"The wery thought as was a tryin' to find its way out o' my 'ead, sir," exclaimed the Stoic of Oakleigh, turning his chair so as to face him of Copesbury. "An' so you really think there's somethink in it yourself? I don't know as I've ever before found anybody to 'gree with me. Quite a prodgidy I calls it."

"You surprise me, sir," observed Mr. Rock. "The opinions you have expressed have been held in common by every statesman, philosopher, and divine from the days of Confucius and Ptolemy the Great to the present time."

"Only think o' that now," said Joshua, looking slowly round the room as if in expectation of applause; "and so Confuser and 'tother chap thought the same as I do, eh?"

"They did that, sir; it was their own invention. When they died it descended to their successors, and in a manner, I may say, their mantle has fallen upon us."

This new and striking idea did not penetrate

to the seat of Mr. Gibbins' intellect all at once. He sat rubbing his chin for some minutes, the usual sign with him of deep cogitation.

"No, you don't mean it?" he said at last; but the tone in which the query was put certainly did not imply any doubt. "Ain't that jest wonderful? Fancy me a-livin' all alone here, and readin' nothink, unless it might be one o' these 'ere auction bills 'bout sales o' stock,—me to know as much as they fellers, who I don't know as I ever heard on afore. That 'ere's what the parson 'ud call insp'ration, I s'pose. Well, I know what's the matter with me now, which is more'n I did. This insp'ration's a rare good thing, mister; as good as a dram o' corjul, and reg'lar warmin' to the vitals."

"Glad to have been the humble instrument of introducing you to it, sir. An auspicious moment, this, sir. Allow me to propose—in a figurative sense—your health; as the legitimate descendant of Confucius and the Ptolemies—every one of 'em, without an exception—Mr. Gibbins, your health." Hiram smacked his lips, and murmured again "in a figurative sense, of course."

"Sir," replied his flattered host, "I looks towards you. Wait a bit." He rose from his chair, and unlocking a cupboard, produced two tumblers and a black bottle. Placing these,

together with a jug of water, on the table, he resumed his seat with the remark, "Now then, let's have all that over again, and we'll do it proper this time."

Mr. Rock after some protestation consenting to repeat his benevolent aspirations on behalf of his new friend's permanent well-being, minus the qualifying expression, each gentleman did his best to prevent the ceremony from remaining a mere empty form, and the tumblers were speedily reduced to that condition instead. The bookseller used his opportunity to discover as much as possible about the state of Arnold's household, the number of his servants, and where they slept. In this quest he was so successful that when he retired for the night it was with the information that the wing in which he was to sleep contained at present no other occupant, and communicated through a door at the end of the passage with an equally deserted floor of bed-rooms,—the principal ones, only used by the master of the house and his friends.

A cheerful fire was blazing on the hearth when he reached his room, for which, as he reflected with some satisfaction, the favourable opinion he had won from Mrs. Marchpane was doubtless responsible. Probably it was the fire which kept him awake for the next two hours,

for at the end of that time he got off the bed on the outside of which he had been lying, cautiously opened the door, and listened attentively for any sound to indicate that some one besides himself was awake and stirring. Then he returned, took a dark lantern out of his bag, lit it, and stole noiselessly out.

Next morning Mr. Rock ensconced himself in the library, and commenced operations. About mid-day his assistant, an individual of seedy appearance, came over from Copesbury, it being impossible,—so his master told Mrs. Marchpane,—for anyone to undertake the work alone. “I quite forgot,” he went on, “to mention this in my letter to Mr. Robur; so I’ve made arrangements for putting him up at the inn. Perhaps it’s the best way on the whole; for, to tell you the truth, he’s not much accustomed to good company, and it’s better he should have his meals there.” Finally it was agreed that lunch should be served to the pair of workers in the library in order that they might be hindered as little as possible; the assistant to come each morning after breakfast and leave at nightfall.

“Well,” said Edwards, as soon as there was no danger of being overheard, “what’s your report? I suppose you can say how much is to be got out of this business by now?”

“What a hurry you’re in,” exclaimed the elder treasure-seeker with virtuous surprise. “There’s plenty of time to look about, and we must be careful, you know. Besides, the catalogue must be made out, and we may as well begin upon that at once. First I must have a list of all the books; will you read out their titles for me to cock down, or shall it be the other way about?”

“Rot the catalogue,” said the other fiercely. “Don’t trifle with me, man; I can see you’ve found something out. What is it?” Then suddenly dropping the bully, and assuming a wheedling tone, he added: “Can’t you see, my dear fellow, how awful it is to be tantalised like this?”

“Your confounded temper will be the ruin of us if you don’t look out, Edwards,” said Mr. Rock evasively. “But you’re right about my having found something out, and I’ll tell you what it is; there’s nothing for us to take in the house; it was a bad shot on our part.”

“Yes, my friend,” he continued after a pause, during which the advertising agent’s pale face had turned paler still with rage and disappointment; “you’ve taken your little holiday all for nothing, and though you look as if you required a change, this isn’t the cheerfullest part of the country to choose for that purpose at this time

of year. Why don't you follow young Robur's example, and go down to stay with him at Burnport instead of making yourself at home here in his absence? Suppose he were to turn up here suddenly; you might find it rather difficult to account for yourself," and the notion set its originator off into a prolonged and exasperating chuckle. While this lasted his comrade sat with clenched fists expressive of a desire to hasten the restoration of Mr. Rock's equanimity by the strongest physical inducements. Fortunately, however, for that gentleman's physiognomy he was sufficiently recovered, by the time Edwards' wrath reached boiling-point, to take up again the thread of his discourse. Discarding his bantering tone, he proceeded.

"Last night I thought it would be as well to reconnoitre a bit, you see. There are very few servants in the house, and they don't sleep near the best rooms; moreover, everybody turns in at ten. Well, I waited till it was past twelve, and then I slipped on a pair of list slippers, took my bull's-eye, and went to see what I could see. I assure you the careless way in which the doors were left unlocked surprised even me. Some few, to be sure, had been locked; but the keys had actually been left sticking in them outside. These people don't deserve to have a single valuable left in their

possession. Valuables ought to belong only to people who know how to look after them. That was what I thought as I looked at all the doors in the gallery just through the passage where the idiots have put me to sleep. When I'd tried them all, and found there wasn't one more secure than the others, I took each of the rooms singly; and may I never crack another thing, if there was a single object to be met with that would serve our purpose. Nothing but old timber, my boy; chairs, tables, wardrobes, four-posters, and such. It's the bloomingest sell I've ever had to swallow. One would have supposed that a place like this, with all its pretensions, would have held something worth looking at, now; if not strong boxes or safes, at least a jewel-case and a plate-chest or so. Nothing of the sort. The reason they don't lock up the doors is because there's nothing worth having inside 'em to lock up."

Edwards smiled incredulously at the manner of this conclusion.

"Pshaw!" he said. "Is that all? You've frightened me for nothing, then. Did you really expect to find something in a strange house by a hurried search at midnight when you were in a funk of being disturbed?"

"At any rate you seemed to think I should," put in Rock rather morosely.

“I!—well, I may have thought you would have been up to some deeper game than that all these hours you’ve been in the house.”

“What was I to do except prowl about, and keep my eyes open, I should like to know?”

“Anyhow, you haven’t prowled enough, that’s evident. You don’t take to this business as kindly as you ought, my good fellow. A long course of shop-keeping and cheating on a small scale has demoralised you, and you’ve positively unfitted yourself for large transactions. As you seem so fond of prowling you may just prowl again to-night; only carry your investigations a little closer, my respectable tradesman; observe the lie of things downstairs, look into cupboards and closets when you get the chance, and see if you can’t find some door after all which it will require our legitimate weapons to open. I’ve got all my ‘sesames’ ready for the job, and don’t want to let ’em rust for want of practice either. Now for this infernal catalogue.”

It was a beautiful illustration for the moralist of the venerable saw “business first, pleasure afterwards” to see this exemplary pair settle down there and then to the distasteful occupation before them, each encouraging the other, and rousing his chivalrous emulation to the needful pitch for performing the irksome duty which

had been so unselfishly incurred. Thus easily does union achieve its objects,—two fools hand in hand accomplishing what one wise man fails to do. And yet, trite as the remark must have been to our great-grandmothers, people are not ashamed to go on declaring that friendship is an end in itself, and not merely a means! Don't you see, you irreconcilables, that union can be of no use unless it exists for a purpose? Union is proverbially strength; (how refreshing to have a text at hand for the overthrow of an adversary!) Now how could we possibly have ascertained that without an object to which the strength could be applied? But, in order to show that this view of the question is not a wilfully limited one, no single detached aspect of a particular phase or kind of union, let us take another case,—that of marriage. Here, it is said, there should be no suspicion of any ulterior motive; love is its own reward, and so forth. Well, *is* it? A knowledge of human nature would seem opposed to this comfortable belief. Great authorities have told us that most out of the few unions formed upon the sole basis of mutual affection fall short of expectation, and come openly to grief. Even the seeming exceptions are in all likelihood nothing of the sort, only in them the contracted parties manage somehow to consume their grief and disappointment

unnoticed. Then again, look at the stock analogy between nations and individuals: do we see states engaging in alliances or treaties dictated by the casual impulse of fancy and sentiment? Quite the contrary; such unions are the fruit of some grave necessity for offensive or defensive combination. The same rule obtains throughout nature, and the very vermin under our feet unite for the purpose of extending their power of ministering to their own comfort. Other feelings are probably altogether absent in their cases, though they exist, and cannot be overlooked, in mankind. But instead of exaggerating their importance, as we are so lamentably prone to do, let them step down from the pedestals which they have usurped, and find their proper level in waiting upon the reason. Friendship is nothing if it is not partnership to begin with; and it is impossible for that man to be successful or happy who does not habitually regulate his actions by the standard of strict commercial principles. Familiar as this sound maxim must be to thorough men of business like Messrs. Edwards and Rock, it is so far from enjoying universal acceptance among the careless and unthriftly majority that a statement in this place of the impregnable position maintained by those gentlemen seems necessary in order to do away, once for all, with any colour-

able pretext for a somewhat delicate misunderstanding which their conduct may or may not afford.

How deeply their hearts were in their work might have been guessed from the appearance of the two men when they met the next morning. Mr. Rock's blinking eyes and frequent yawns betokened a restless night, while the look of strained anticipation on his friend's interesting countenance was scarcely less expressive.

"What luck?" were the first words that almost broke from Edwards in the excitement of this critical moment. Indeed, it was clear that, should the second search prove as unfruitful as the first, they must consider themselves the victims of a most unfortunate speculation.

"I don't know," growled the indefatigable Hiram in answer to his question; "anyhow it's not as bad as it might be, and that's all I can say for it."

"Curse your long-winded palaver; can't you tell me the whole thing straight out instead of putting me off with all this humbug?" and the agent flung himself into a chair with a liberal and comprehensive volley of oaths.

His colleague eyed him with scornful pity, and allowed a considerable interval to elapse before he condescended to reply. At length, however, finding that Edwards continued to sulk obstinately,

he cleared his throat, and proceeded to administer a sharp rebuke to his refractory ally.

“You’re enough to make a man turn round and say you may manage the business by yourself,” he continued, “and I’d do it too, if I didn’t know it was my fate to be mixed up with you for good, letting alone what is due to the honour of a—ahem—gentleman. I should recommend you to be a little more cautious in future, Mr. Edwards, unless you want to take every one in the house into our confidence. When you interrupted me I was about to observe that I made a very complete tour of inspection last night, and took my time over examining everything that looked the least suspicious. Well, the result is that there’s only one wardrobe of which I haven’t seen the inside, and which may contain something better than the rubbish in all the others. It stands in a recess by the head of the bed in Robur’s own room, and I didn’t notice it before. Either you or I will have to work that article of furniture to-night, as they expect us to clear out by to-morrow afternoon. It looks as if it would want forcing, as I can’t lay my hand on the key, and wasted half an hour in trying to pick the lock. Perhaps you’ll say I haven’t done enough because the coals in the cellar aren’t diamonds, as they ought to be.”

This speech, though its tone was not concili-

atory, had a marvellously soothing effect upon its auditor. He even went so far as to grasp his partner's hand in token of apology before replying in quite a sprightly manner,—“Let's go on with those books for a bit; that will give me time to cipher out a plan of attack on the fortress. I shall get my expenses paid, after all,” and he executed a plausible imitation of a laugh.

“By the bye,” said Rock, turning round with some books in his hand from the shelf where he was engaged, “false delicacy being out of the question between us, you'll forgive my mentioning that your amiable exterior has failed to produce a good opinion of you among the servants.”

“Damn the servants,” snarled the other, “what's that got to do with us?”

“Only this,” returned the bookseller dryly, “that their distrust of you will extend to me directly anything's missed, and then it won't be easy to put them off the scent. Whatever we do, we must take care it won't be found out while we are here.”

“Umph,” ejaculated Edwards, “how did you discover they suspected me?”

“An accident, dear boy, a fortunate accident; I overheard Gibbins—that's the chap that comes in sometimes to see how we're getting on—talking to the housekeeper about you.”

A long pause ensued, during which the agent

brooded over this last piece of information. At length he said in a low voice, "Can you make a plan of that room, giving its position on the floor, and the place in it occupied by the wardrobe?"

"I shouldn't think much of myself if I couldn't," was the satisfactory rejoinder; and sitting down to the table Mr. Rock was able in a very few minutes to convey an accurate notion of the requisite details in black and white.

"That's the citadel," said he, when he had finished; "I've marked it with a cross to distinguish it from the suburbs, as one might call all the rest. The best entrance for a stranger with an inquiring turn of mind, who was too modest to go to the front door and disturb the inmates, would be through this window, which is in the passage just outside my room," and he indicated it with his pen.

"There are no bars or shutters, and though it's about a dozen feet from the ground, there's a delightful water-pipe running down the wall from the roof which would be as good as a ladder to said stranger, if nimble. Then there's a shrubbery below to catch him if he falls, and if he was to wear gloves he couldn't even scratch his hands. Once inside, the best route is along this dotted line, and," he added, handing the paper to Edwards, "the stranger may be left to his own devices."

“Now, then,” said that gentleman, buttoning his coat over the document, “I’ll tell you how we can do this thing, and disarm suspicion at one blow. When I get back to the inn to-night I shall give out I’m going over to see a friend at Burfield, and shan’t be back before eleven, perhaps not till later. Very well, I shall really go there to pass the time, and it won’t be a bad thing to offer to take a message for the landlord. Everything will be snug here by half-past ten, and with your list slippers it won’t make any difference even if they are not all asleep. Anyhow, no one will be on the floor in question except you and me.”

Rock nodded encouragingly, and he went on. “Well, I can manage the whole business comfortably in half an hour, and shall get back to the inn,—say by a quarter-past eleven. At twelve o’clock, when I am safe to be in bed and asleep, you must make a racket, and break a pane of glass in the window which I shall leave open; only you must take care that the broken glass falls inside on to the carpet, to give it the appearance of having been done by a burglar in forcing his way in, you see. By the way, you haven’t got a revolver with you, I suppose?”

“No,” replied his smiling comrade; “I’ve had an objection to fire-arms ever since——”

“Never mind, then,” interrupted the other,

“I’ll leave mine at your door on my return from the room, and you must fire one of the chambers through the open window. We don’t want to do more than alarm the servants, so I wouldn’t fire more than one ; it will be quite enough to make them look upon you as their preserver.”

Mr. Rock raised his hands in a kind of ecstatic benediction. “Creative genius, creative genius,” he sighed, “how beautiful you are ! In list slippers,” he continued, returning to the practical and commonplace after a moment’s rapturous contemplation, “in list slippers your footsteps can’t be traced, no matter how soft the soil may be here and there, and we can burn them afterwards. Only take care they are not spotted at the inn, dear boy ; take great care they are not spotted at the inn.”

That evening the bookseller excelled himself. His flow of sparkling anecdote moved Mrs. Marchpane to tears of laughter, and some of his sallies of wit even communicated a risible influence to the waistcoat of the austere Gibbins himself.

“We shall sleep well after this,” said the housekeeper when the gentlemen rose to retire, and the bailiff gaped sympathetically.

Mr. Rock had to thank his excellent strategy that the servants were sent to bed earlier than usual, and the lights in the upper windows

showed that the house would be soon hushed in slumber when he left Joshua preparing to turn in, and reached his own door. Cautiously unfastening the window-catch in the passage, he raised the lower sash about an inch that it might open easily from outside, and softly drew up the blind half way. Then he entered his room, and closed the door without quite fastening it.

“Lucky he’s got a coat with those convenient inside pockets,” he meditated, “or some one might have noticed the slippers when he took them away. What with them, a clothes-brush, lantern, and jemmies, he’ll have enough to carry. What a clever chap he is, too; fancy his thinking of a mask! I can scarcely believe his being up to such dodges, if this is his first attempt at the particular style of thing, as he says.”

Left to himself Hiram was becoming sleepy. Nature has no reverence for the diplomatist, and demands her tribute even in his case. He had been gradually lapsing into unconsciousness in a chair in front of the fire, when he shook himself together with a start, and began to face the fact that he was about to be baulked of another good night’s rest.

“The thing ought to be done realistically,” he mused; “I must uncase, and go to bed, though the devil knows how I’m to stay awake if I do.” His eyelids were so heavy when he had put out

the candle, and lay back on the pillow, that he felt as if nothing short of a couple of wedges could keep them open. Alternately dozing and listening, he gradually began to give more time to the former and less to the latter operation, till a sudden violent reveille from his own nose caused him to spring up in a panic, and light a match to look at the time. Reassured by the hands of his watch, which stood close upon eleven, that the ominous sound had at any rate no connexion with the feathered 'trumpet to the morn,' he crept to the door, and was just in time to see something like a hand disappear round the corner of the window-sill outside. Hurriedly noticing that the lower part of the window itself stood open wide enough to admit a man's body, he concluded that Edwards had accomplished his mission in safety. This opinion was shortly confirmed by the sight of the revolver on the carpet near his feet; having made himself master of which agreeable bed-fellow, and finding that it was loaded in every chamber, he got once more between the sheets. This time, however, the interval did not pass so quickly. He was thoroughly roused, and though he closed his eyes, his consciousness of any passing sound or tremor seemed heightened rather than diminished by so doing.

"How I wish I could have really put the

contents of that little persuader into his body as he got through the window," he thought, as he tossed about waiting for twelve o'clock to come ; "and so I would have, if the thing had been possible without damaging myself just as much. I can't help myself now that he has come to life again to spite me."

He maundered on about his friend's foibles, and his own hard position, till a few minutes past midnight. Then he rose, lit his candle, put on a pair of shoes and an overcoat, and leaning out of the window, smashed in a pane in the right place with his elbow as noiselessly as possible. After pausing to remove the pieces of glass from his sleeve, and satisfying himself that no one had been disturbed as yet, he proceeded to bang his door energetically a few times, and rushed up and down the passage shouting with all his might. This proceeding was not long in rousing the desired commotion. The sound of footsteps was already upon the stairs when he fired the pistol through the open sash, and sank back in a well-feigned paralysis of terror against an angle of the wall. In this attitude he was discovered by Mr. Gibbins, who, with a light in one hand and a cudgel in the other, was advancing gingerly towards the scene of the disturbance. So startled was he upon suddenly turning the corner to find his brother philosopher in

what appeared to be a truly woful predicament that the candlestick fell from his grasp with a crash, thereby narrowly escaping a greater tragedy than the matter in hand,—a holocaust, namely, in which the hero of the hour might have played the chief, if an unwilling, part. As it was, a shriek arose from Mrs. Marchpane's contingent at the other end of the passage, in spite of Hiram's prompt extinction of the cause of danger by covering it with the door-mat.

This little incident rather spoiled his enjoyment of the dramatic situation, but he nevertheless persevered nobly, and pointing to the window gasped, "He got out there; I was too late, and missed him. Run round the front way, man, and you may find him even now," he added, addressing the bailiff.

Gibbins had his own view of the case, however, and suggested that they should see first what harm the burglar had done, and also look about for anything he might have dropped when Mr. Rock surprised him.

Mrs. Marchpane, fearful of something happening to Joshua, seconded his proposal, and observed that the door in the passage had been opened, though she remembered to have shut it before she went to bed.

"Then," remarked Gibbins, assuming a truculent demeanour, "rest upon me;" and ably

supported by the gallant bookseller he marched at the head of the little party towards Arnold's room. The door stood open, and in they all walked, pale but resolute. The housekeeper was the first to see what was wrong.

"Why it's master's wardrobe the thief's been at," said she, pushing past the others; "he always keeps the key on his bunch, and took it away with him to Burnport."

While Mrs. Marchpane was staring ruefully at the ransacked wardrobe, and Gibbins was exploring under the bed, something in a dark corner attracted Mr. Rock's attention. It was a jewel-case which had evidently been forced open and rifled of its contents. The tray was lying at a little distance; Edwards must have filled his pockets, and then flung the box aside as a useless encumbrance.

"Hullo, what's this?" said Hiram, taking it all in at a glance; and he stepped forward to pick up the case.

"That?" said Mrs. Marchpane, when it had been brought to the light; "why, it's my poor mistress's old jewel-case that was too small to hold all her things, so that she had another one made for them specially, and it's at the bank. If that's what the rogue has been after, he's had all his trouble for nothing, Mr. Rock. Well, this is enough to amuse a body, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XI.

MEN OF HONOUR.

“There be that can packe the cards, and yet cannot play well.”
Bacon.

MORNING dawned at Oakleigh upon an unsettled household. Tempers were ruffled by the unusual disorganisation ; no one seemed inclined for work, and there was quite a smart epidemic of colds in the head. Breakfast was not ready at the usual hour ; so the male portion of the garrison went out to glean some information of the precise nature of the nocturnal assault. Making a careful detour of the house, nothing worthy of notice met their gaze till they arrived below the window through which the shot had been fired. The shrubbery at that point exhibited signs of having been disturbed, a few twigs were broken, and the soil had a trampled appearance, though no clear impression of a boot was to be found anywhere, a fact at which Mr. Rock expressed considerable surprise.

"The fellow must have walked away on his head," he said at last, when a searching scrutiny had more than ever confirmed his admiration of his confederate's artistic finish; "plenty to do here for the Burfield police, eh, Mr. Gibbins?"

The bailiff nodded laconically. "Not as I can ax 'em to do anythink without the master's orders," he grumbled. "I s'pose I must write and tell him about this here bit o' work. Fancy a chap a-creepin' in here, and givin' us all this sight o' trouble for jest nothin' but a broken winder. Powerful mean and sneakin' I calls it."

The full unpleasantness of the situation had only dawned upon Joshua with the conviction just arrived at that he would have to write a letter. Not till that moment had the audacity of this wanton interference with the rights of property and the repose of private citizens seemed to him so hideous a piece of sacrilege. That he, a quiet and irreproachable individual, should be at the mercy of every vagabond who chose to put him to the inconvenience of becoming a special correspondent was an injury not to be thought of with any degree of calmness.

"You don't mean to say you would waste a couple of days before you do anything!" exclaimed Mr. Rock; "why, it's a sin and a shame

to wait a minute longer, if you can help it. Such delay is scandalous, sir, quite scandalous in my opinion."

"I dessay your opinion may be wuth a good deal in a gen'ral way, sir," responded Gibbins, not sorry for an opportunity of displaying some of his spleen, "but p'raps you'll b'lieve me when I say as I ain't used to no conterradiction from outsiders, Mr. Rock. Does the cares o' this house rest upon you, or does they rest upon me, sir? You seems wonderful interested in us for a stranger, to be sure."

"No more than any other impartial observer would do in my place, sir," said the virtuous bookseller, with noble self-effacement. "No doubt you are quite right, Mr. Gibbins; but won't you be persuaded to send a telegram instead of a letter?"

"What! and let the folks at the post-office know all about it?"

"But won't they know anyhow? Gossip, my dear sir, will soon spread the news, unless Oakleigh is different from every other place in the world."

But Gibbins, though he was beginning to regain his wonted placidity, remained obdurate.

"Well, I ain't the one to set it a-goin'," he remarked. "You see, you want to do too much. You've shot off your gun, now it's my turn to

post my letter. We'll have breakfast fust, though ; and don't you say nothink to *her*."

It has been hinted more than once that Mr. Rock's forte was diplomacy,—which is the more remarkable because he never displayed any acquaintance with French, and therefore could have possessed none. For there is a natural connexion between private and political intrigue and every other kind of subtlety subservient to it. Now the real importance of foreign languages consists in the fact—as yet only comprehended by diplomatists—that each is the appropriate medium for expressing different sentiments. There is a peculiar fitness in the use of German as a vehicle for metaphysics, Spanish for social courtesies, Italian for the softer emotions, Latin for academic themes and moral disquisitions. As to English, it is such a mongrel affair that it can hardly be said to present any particularly striking characteristic of its own, but rather adapts itself automatically to the disposition of the individual user. Perhaps, however, its gradual Americanisation will end in giving it a decided advantage for the discussion of commercial transactions, and establish its pre-eminence as a record of the vicissitudes of buying and selling. In Coleridge's remark about the very phrases of the French language being so composed that it can scarcely be spoken

without lying, a profound philosophical explanation is contained of the persistent survival of that tongue in the mouths of courtiers and ambassadors. Whatever modes of expressing themselves so as to conceal their real feelings have been devised by other civilised nations, the French are certain to excel them in this respect; and no better illustration of the rule could be furnished than its exception in the case of Hiram Rock. His British origin is only explicable on the ground that his talent for scheming was wholly subordinate to his genius as a man of business; it might even be maintained, without intending injury to our neighbours' feelings, that France could not have produced such a man.

The rough draft of the catalogue had still to be completed, and Mr. Rock hurried over his 'matutinal muffin' in order to join his assistant in the library. He was surprised to find Edwards more resigned than he had anticipated. Great reverses must be sustained with fortitude or they would be too much for flesh and blood to bear. The luxury of worry is reserved for comparatively trivial and endurable misfortunes. Each gave the other his account of what had occurred without comment, and the melancholy aspect of the situation was unrelieved by the smallest approach to badinage on Hiram's

part. Then they set to work at once as the best means of forgetting their sorrows, labouring in a hopeless, mechanical way.

How noiselessly does Fate spin her invisible entanglements; her sternest exigencies being often but trifles in their origin, gossamer meshes which time transmutes into bonds of adamant. Edwards on the ladder was already reading out the titles of the books in the last shelf, while his companion wrote them down on a slip of paper, which for greater convenience he had fixed to a small piece of board by means of drawing-pins. They had finished up the paper provided for them, but had not thought it worth while to ring for more as Edwards happened to have a blank sheet in his pocket which was sufficient for the purpose. As the bookseller took it he noticed that it bore the printed address of the newspaper office at which his friend was employed; but neither of them thinking this to be of any consequence, since the paper was to be used simply for a private memorandum, he had begun to cover it with a list of names.

“Heigh-ho,” sighed Edwards, “this is the last;” and he drew out a heavy volume at the end of the row.

A fine old bureau of black oak, half writing-table, half book-case, was standing open close by the ladder, and as he spoke the book slipped

from his grasp, and fell to the floor, striking the movable flap of the bureau smartly on its way. Edwards descended from his perch, picked it up, and was about to replace it when he uttered a sudden exclamation which brought Hiram out of his easy-chair before the fire, and made him enquire what was the matter.

"Look," said the other, pointing to that part of the bureau which would be covered when the flap was closed, "don't you see anything?"

Mr. Rock hastily approaching, pulled his spectacles down over his nose, and peered into the recess. A crack about a quarter of an inch wide was visible between the hinges of the flap, and evidently indicated a sliding panel moving inwards to the back of the structure.

"Capitally managed," said Hiram admiringly, "no one would have dreamed of a secret drawer here, all the space seems accounted for without it. The fellow who made this knew how to keep a secret."

So saying he took a knife from his pocket, and with the blade pushed back the panel, though not without some difficulty from the resistance of the spring by which it was worked. There appeared to be no catch to hold it when open; so Rock fitted the piece of board containing the last portion of the catalogue into the aperture before probing the cavity below. "Aha!

it's made sloping backwards," he cried ; " that's why we overlooked it, my boy. Hullo, what's this ? " and he brought out a good-sized packet of yellow papers tied with a faded ribbon ; " securities, or deeds of some sort, put here and forgotten, eh ? "

Edwards snatched the bundle from him, and untied the ribbon, his comrade watching him eagerly with twitching fingers. The advertising agent's face fell as he scanned one by one the dusty documents before him.

" Pah ! love-letters," he muttered, letting them flutter down onto the carpet. " Are you sure there's nothing more ? "

Mr. Rock was engaged on his knees in collecting the papers, so his junior partner tried his hand on the bureau, with the result of bringing to light a small case of leather. Opening this he discovered an antique ring, with a plain gold guard of more modern make containing a band of hair, in which two shades seemed to be evenly blended.

" Well, here's something at last," remarked Hiram, " that ring's worth having, depend upon it, and sure not to be missed for ever so long."

" Nothing of the sort," said Edwards in a disgusted tone, examining it attentively. " The setting is half the value, and that would be spotted anywhere ; look at these figures and

scrolls and enamel; and then there's a motto inside, *Amor rex et lex.*"

"But then the stone's valuable, anyhow," pleaded Hiram; "come, we must have that, it's such a big one."

"I tell you it's no good," returned the other angrily, "it's shaped like a heart, and would be known anywhere; I'm not going to be mixed up with receivers of stolen goods for nothing, I can tell you; no more are you, if you've got any sense in your head."

"Safest not, I suppose," said Mr. Rock sadly, "but it does seem like ingratitude to Providence to chuck this lovely thing away. Shut it up again, my dear boy, before we're tempted to do anything rash," and he himself set the example by proceeding to tie up the letters again before replacing them. Edwards said nothing; apparently his feelings were too much for him. He had turned his back on his cautious confederate, and it seemed inconsiderate to bother him just at this moment of supreme aggravation. Rock looked round for the ring-case; it was on the table. He seized it hastily—it would never do to expose himself to the anguish of another hopeless glimpse of its contents,—and uttering a disconsolate groan dropped it with the bundle into the cavity.

What was his surprise to see the piece of wood

which he had placed to keep the panel open fall in after them, disturbed by the shock of their descent, and the lid close with a click. But surprise became horror when Edwards turned at the sound, holding the identical ring and guard in his hand which Rock was already congratulating himself upon having placed beyond the reach of his own and his partner's cupidity.

The two men stared blankly at each other. Both understood at once what had occurred, and there was no disguising the awkwardness of this new predicament.

"Damnation!" ejaculated Edwards thickly, "you've done it now."

"Don't give in yet; we've opened it once, let's try again," and Hiram began to jolt and shake the bureau in every conceivable way in the hope of inducing the friendly crack to reappear. Their united efforts, however, had not the slightest effect upon the panel, which remained just as obstinately closed after they had dropped books from the top of the ladder upon the flap for a quarter of an hour as it was before. There was scarcely a square inch in the surface of the bureau which they did not rummage and tap to equally little purpose, and in the end they were forced to sit down when every expedient had been exhausted, and acquiesce in the galling fact

that a jewel had been thrown on their hands, which, however intrinsically valuable, was worse than worthless to them; while the most conclusive evidence of their involuntary theft was left in its place for the owner of the ring to use at his discretion.

There was little outspoken recrimination between the partners of the ruined firm; whatever they may have thought, they were too well-bred to do more than silently reproach themselves.

"Why couldn't you have sat up to the table to do your list, instead of fastening it to a treacherous board?" vainly enquired the senior's outraged conscience.

"Why did you let him have that stamped paper?" clamoured the junior's inward monitor.

But the presence of a great danger has often an ennobling effect in the closer union of men's sympathies with each other.

"We have a common interest in keeping this dark," said Edwards at last, breaking a somewhat oppressive silence.

"In this catastrophe we must stand by each other like—Britons," was Rock's frank response. "It's enough to make one cut such irregular pursuits, and throw one's tools down the nearest well," he added.

An earnest consultation followed, in which all

the circumstances of the case were rigorously sifted. It was highly probable from the dusty state of the contents of the secret drawer that its existence was unknown to the master of the house. The bureau was to all appearances a genuine heirloom,—none of your sham pieces of patchwork which swarm plentifully everywhere, and whose uniform tint of age has a curious affinity with the stuff in upholsterers' paint-pots. Might it not be—was it not, indeed, almost certain—that some dead hand had placed the ring and letters in their concealment, and that now no living soul besides themselves held the knowledge? They wished they had paid more attention to those letters; it was clear that, if any answer to this important question remained above ground, it was to be found in the forgotten records of which they had declined in their blind impetuosity to avail themselves. Maddened by the thought, they were half inclined to burst the panel open, and replace the ring by force. But this course proved on examination to be impossible without at once attracting suspicion. The stout oak was far too solid to be tampered with, and was held in its place with the grip of an iron vice. Without the proper implements, and security from interruption, it was useless to attempt to make a breach, even had it been safe to do so on other grounds; and Rock knew well

that the greatest precautions would be taken to prevent a second nocturnal inroad.

The more they considered the matter the more disastrous seemed the total which its elements composed. Robur possessed a letter from Rock ; even supposing it was lost or destroyed he would recognise the writing on the list, should he ever discover it. Sooner or later an accident would reveal the secret of the bureau, as it had been revealed that day. For the future both partners felt that they could never know what it was to be secure again. Edwards, too, was fatally implicated by the address on the paper. What did it matter if, as his friend assured him, nobody in the house had heard his name ? There was the clue which must trace him always at Robur's disposal. He must throw up his situation at the *Tuba* office, and be run to earth some day in spite of all.

"We can't even offer to buy the concern," he said moodily, with a kick at the bureau.

"Certainly not, unless we want to cut our own throats," responded the other. "He's not so hard up that he wants to part with his furniture, though there ain't anything worth taking in the house."

"You'll have to leave Copesbury and change your name again ; I suppose you know that ?"

"I'm not so sure about it, my boy. Suppose

this blooming panel does go and peach, how's he to know there was anything in it besides those letters?"

"No matter *how* he'll find out, there'll always be the chance that he will, especially with your damned list to help him."

"Well, if you leave the *Tuba*, and I go away from Copesbury, won't there be something funny about our both disappearing simultaneously?"

"True, O king; we'd better toss up which is to go."

"Not a bit, and I'll tell you why. You can do as you like, but I shall stay on at present,—not because I couldn't do just as well elsewhere, but because I'm safe to hear if young Robur finds out about the ring soon enough to get away, and drop my identity. Whenever I want to know anything I can always get it out of old Gibbins, the bailiff. He comes over to markets at Copesbury, and I shall take precious good care to keep up the connexion. What we want is a confidential man to hang round here and watch events, and he'll do well enough for the job, with a little managing, till we can find some one better. Why, the thing may never leak out in our lifetime at all, and I'm not going to err on the side of recklessness again, my boy, don't you think it."

"H'm, as long as you're careful you won't do

any harm, I take it," said Edwards in a musing tone. "Plenty of things may happen," he continued; "the house may get burnt down, or young Robur may die. This going about for his health, and doing nothing, don't look as if his life was a particularly good one. I wonder what he does at Burnport. It would be grand if we could hit on someone who had a grudge against him, and throw everything upon *his* shoulders. Anyhow, I mean to give them the slip, so you can look out for yourself, so long as we back each other up whenever there's occasion."

Hiram agreed effusively. He was not sorry that his friend should keep out of the way, and leave him as ignorant of his whereabouts as other people. "He'll make a convenient scape-goat if I should ever want one," he thought to himself. What would become of diplomacy without mental reservations?

They had just time to make a fresh copy of that portion of the list which had been lost, before Gibbins came round to the door with the chaise to convey them to Burfield. Many were the compliments bestowed by Mrs. Marchpane upon the elderly cavalier, who, as she said, "had risked his own life to save them all;" and profuse the acknowledgments of her hospitality which greeted her in return.

As they turned the corner of the drive Rock

tried to stand up and wave his hat to the house-keeper, and narrowly escaped a bad spill from the vehicle in consequence.

"Sit down, man," said Joshua gruffly, "do you want to frighten the 'oss, or break the springs?"

"He do seem a nice old gentleman," remarked Rhoda Dandrum, as Mrs. Marchpane re-entered the house somewhat regretfully.

"The hoary head is a crown of glory," quoted the old lady in reply, settling her cap over her own locks, with which the wind had trifled a little rudely. "May you be able to say as much for me, my girl, when my head is as white as his."

Gibbins' urbanity was completely restored under Mr. Rock's lubricating influence by the time they reached the station.

"I've sent that 'ere letter," he whispered, as he assisted the bookseller with his bag, "and I've put in somethink about you that 'ud make your mouth water."

"Have you though?" said Hiram, much gratified; "that was kind of you, Mr. Gibbins, and I'm not the man to forget a kindness. No, sir. But I'm afraid you've made more of my poor efforts than they deserve; I am, indeed." However, he consented to be soothed upon this point on condition that the bailiff paid him a visit if

he found time when at Copesbury, besides promising to write if there was any news about the burglar.

“I’m naturally anxious to hear more about the fellow I tried to catch for you,” he said, shaking Joshua’s hand; “besides, I know the inspector at our police-station; and might be useful to you in case he could do anything.”

Arrived at Copesbury, Edwards immediately took his departure for London, carrying off the ring with him “for safe keeping,” as he jocularly informed his friend.

“You’ll probably hear from me soon,” he said at parting; “it will be easy to invent a safe way of corresponding.”

Rock professed himself quite satisfied with the arrangement, only advising the other to get rid of the knick-knack, for fear he might be tempted to air it in public.

“Trust me,” replied that trustworthy individual; “I might drop it into the Thames as I go home to-night.”

Mr. Rock’s shutters at the Cope-house had remained up since his departure for Oakleigh, and his ‘young man’—very young indeed, in fact, a boy—had been given a holiday during the interval. The bookseller was otherwise unassisted in the conduct of the establishment, having no family to manage even his domestic

affairs. His mention of a son of his to Arnold on the occasion of their first interview must not however be considered to contradict the undoubted fact that his childless condition had never been anything else ; for it would be unfair to judge so harshly of a man who merely adopts the beautiful Positivist romance of investing his bachelorhood with the halo of paternity. Coarse souls, alas ! have been planted everywhere only too thickly ; and it is possible that such refinements may elude some comprehensions. But whose fault is that ? If the majority of our neighbours are groundlings, must we therefore clip our soaring pinions to the general pattern ?

Upon the arrival of Hiram's body-servant the next morning to remove the shutters and resume his duties, which included every sort of menial office except cooking, for his master took his meals at a tavern hard by, he was greeted with an unusual moral repast in the form of a lecture upon the relations of employers and employed. . .

"Now, Thomas, while you're cleaning those boots," said Mr. Rock, throwing down a pair on the shop floor, "you will do well to incline your ear unto the precepts of age." Hereupon he seated himself upon the staircase that led upwards out of the shop, folded his arms, and frowned majestically upon the astonished

youngster. "Thomas," he continued, observing that his attendant hesitated, "proceed to apply the blacking; you can't afford to lose what wits you've got. After a period of repose, Thomas, work should be the pleasanter, pleasant as it must be at all times to serve an indulgent patron. You've had your fling, and come back prepared, however satisfied you may be with your past career, to do better in future."

"Yessir, I wants to better myself in future," said Thomas, moistening his brush by a natural and unaffected process.

His master eyed him severely for a moment, and then went on.

"Listen to one who has had some experience of life outside Copesbury, Thomas. To speak only of your present occupation, many are the agreeable and instructive lessons that may be drawn from the art of cleaning boots. Scraped soles, and glossy upper leathers, are nothing to the meaning and the poetry inside a boot, whether on or off the foot. Why, you young rascal, you ought to be paying me for the advantage of contemplating these interesting objects alone, not to mention the hundred other things I allow you to handle freely, d'ye hear? Let us consider the operation from its commencement. Having carefully dried the articles in question, you must spread the blacking—the

best quality, mind—evenly over the whole surface; and take care that you mix it properly, and don't drown the generous stuff with water. Now just you remember that with all your work; begin at the right time in the morning, so as to strike while the iron's hot, and spread your work evenly all over the day. Don't you crowd it, my young friend,—don't you rush for it with a hop, skip, and jump, doing what you like, and leaving what you don't care about. And then it must be work that's worth having; you mustn't stop short after brushing a few cobwebs off the roof, you must go on right through the house down to the ground. No adulterating labour with idleness; no holding boots over the gas because you haven't given yourself time to dry them properly beforehand; you're sure to be found out, and directly the leather splits it splits on you. No, Thomas; do things on the square, even down to the polish and style you put into your work, and you won't regret it. There's nothing prospers quite like honesty," and Mr. Rock took a deliberate survey of the surrounding shelves as if he half expected his eyes to rest upon something that did nearly as well. "Honesty is a necessary quality in servants," he resumed; "remember that, and you won't starve. As for the masters, they've got to set you work, and see you do it. But that's no business of yours; so

all you've got to do is to take warning by what I've said, or you'll never have a chance of bettering yourself."

Upon Thomas evincing a disposition to put a private and most unwarrantable construction upon this concluding remark, a regard for his personal security counselled immediate retirement, and Hiram was left to deplore the degeneracy of youth in a solitude undisturbed for hours by a single customer. His mid-day bread and cheese had been consumed, and he had come back to his chair behind the counter, close to the stove, when a shadow suddenly cut off the sunlight which was streaming through the window, and roused him from the doze of innocent repletion.

"Now, young gent, come in, if you're coming," muttered Hiram, annoyed by the vacillating demeanour of the shadow's proprietor. The "young gent" slowly complying, the door opened upon a lanky, overgrown figure somewhat too fashionably clad, and surmounted by so tall a parapet of collar that its wearer would have found a chin an extremely awkward encumbrance.

"Want to see a book in your window," drawled this person languidly.

"Yes, sir," said the bookseller with beaming alacrity, "certainly, sir," and he shuffled round

the counter. "Which might it be of all these, sir, which I may have the honour of presenting to your notice, sir?"

His customer, with a gratified blush, indicated the book he wanted, and Mr. Rock reached it down for him.

"*'A full and true account of the stirring Adventures of Captain Gawrey, together with a faithful narrative of his last moments upon the Scaffold. London; printed for John Smith at the Chopping-Block in Fleet Street.'* That's a work of rare merit, sir; I don't wonder at your taking an interest in it. The gentleman I got that book from brought it to me one day, and says he, 'For God's sake, Mr. Rock, take it and rid me of it; I had the misfortune to read it once, and now I can't sleep with it in the house.' 'Dear me,' says I, taking up the book and looking at it, just as you are doing now, sir; 'what's the matter with it?' 'Well,' he says, and I give you my honour his teeth chattered so he could hardly get a word out, 'there's an accuracy of description and a fidelity to detail about those adventures that makes one feel as if one had been through 'em all oneself; the thing's too real, I can't stand it.' He didn't live long after he gave me the book, poor gentleman; so you might almost say it was responsible for his death. But it's just the reading for a spirited young gent

like yourself, sir ; the taste for sermons, according to my experience, comes later."

A bargain was soon struck, and Hiram enquired to what address he might direct the parcel.

" F. Dalton, Esq., junr., Beau Séjour, Burfield," was the reply.

" I was close by there yesterday, sir," said the bookseller, making a note of it ; " perhaps you may know Mr. Robur, sir, who lives at Oakleigh ? "

" Rather, I should think I did ; why, there's been a robbery at his house."

Rock could not help giving a little start ; then he said briskly, " True, I was staying in the house myself at the time ; went over to catalogue the books, you know ; but we couldn't stop the thief. However, he didn't find anything to take, they tell me ; so it's not so bad as it might be. Nothing fresh happened, I suppose, sir ? "

Frank replied in the negative, and enquired if his new friend was the hero of the pistol, about whom he had heard from Gibbins.

Mr. Rock made the admission apologetically. " What a thing is notoriety," said he ; " I shall see my name in the *Copesbury Courier and Slugwash Sentinel* next. And so you know Mr. Robur, sir ? he has the reputation of being a charming young gentleman, sir."

Frank grunted. "Has he? Reputations ain't always true, then," he muttered.

His customer's manifest dislike of Arnold did not escape the wary Hiram. However, he thought he would go on and make sure.

"You surprise me, sir; nothing could exceed his affability through the little I have had to do with him in a business way."

"Tastes differ; I'm not one of his friends."

"A painful subject, sir, I see; allow me to ask your pardon; the sweets of conversation with one's betters sometimes lure one unawares on to forbidden ground, as a great wit, whose name I have forgotten, pithily has it." Then he began to launch out into a tide of reminiscences about criminals and detectives, till Frank thought he had never before met such an engaging companion. He even took a chair when Rock offered him one, and listened with all his ears. Suddenly the bookseller broke off in the middle of an exciting narrative about an escape from prison, and said abruptly, "You smoke, sir?" Frank drawing a meerschaum from his pocket was implored to load it and make himself comfortable.

"There's nothing like an atmosphere of tobacco-smoke for improving the flavour of a story," said Mr. Rock, "though I can't afford to indulge myself that way as often as I should like."

Frank's conversion to democratic principles

was completed by this congenial sentiment. Hitherto he had not been accustomed to meet the advances of those whom he regarded as social inferiors with anything like cordiality. But when he was reluctantly compelled to depart in order to keep an engagement with Armitage, he confessed to himself that he had never known what good company was until the moment when he entered the shop kept by his entertainer. He begged Hiram to procure for him the histories of some of the personages from whose fascinating careers the bookseller had extracted most of his anecdotes that afternoon, and offered of his own accord to make the Copehouse his rendezvous as often as he paid a visit to the town, which would probably be about twice a week during Armitage's period of residence, the latter having offered to take him in hand as an experiment, much to the elder Mr. Dalton's temporary relief. When he reached home that evening he was able to inform his family that the arrangement was settled, and Grace was somewhat astonished to find that he contemplated the idea of doing a little reading under these fresh auspices with wonderful equanimity. She would have been still more surprised, perhaps, if he had said anything about the literary friendship which he had been so fortunate in forming.

CHAPTER XII.

JUST HIS LUCK.

“To our friend, the hours seemed moments ; holy was he and happy : the words from those sweetest lips came over him like dew on thirsty grass ; all better feelings in his soul seemed to whisper, It is good for us to be here.”—*Sartor Resartus*.

THE two days following Arnold's call on the Misses Blunsden passed without any occurrence of an exciting nature. The uncomfortable character of our hero's slumbers on that evening made him resolve to once more indulge his animal propensities and take exercise of a moderately violent character, but he met with no adventures. However, his temper suffered, because his return to life on the ocean wave cut him off from the sight of his charmer, and he was in a very grumbling mood, as he dressed himself for dinner on the Thursday evening. He mislaid his collar stud, and found it comfortably bestowed in the place where he had set it with his own hands on a corner of the mantelpiece, after pouring forth for his own gratification

a stream of abuse of the chambermaid for "putting his things in order. Confound her! why on earth couldn't she let alone?" The charge was quite unfounded—the particular damsel to whom Arnold's room was assigned was sufficiently unorthodox to have a firm belief that some works are works of supererogation. She never was known to have done those things she ought not to have done, though her sins of omission were countless.

When he found that his expressions of indignation as directed against the maid were superfluous, he turned his attention to the linen, and used quite unjustifiable language about the excellent laundress employed at his hotel! Then his tie wouldn't tie; his boots wouldn't go on: his coat was creased; nothing, somehow, was right this evening with our friend—and all for no mortal reason, but that for the space of forty-eight hours he had not been able to set eyes on a girl to whom he had never spoken, and as far as he could see was never likely to speak.

Alas for frail humanity! Arnold was quite aware that it was very wrong to lose control of his temper; he was conscious that his satisfaction was diminished rather than increased by these ebullitions; there was no doubt in his mind that the passionate principle was at present overriding the rational in a very unphilosophic

manner; but he wilfully and deliberately gave way to unreasoning wrath, and started to make his way to East Rise in a sadly sulky frame of mind. He was even disposed to think disrespectfully of the two good souls whom he had found so unexpectedly entertaining two days before.

"They're all very well," he growled as he sauntered up the ascent, "they're all very well, no doubt, but it's a confounded bore having to nuisance oneself with them. I wonder whether they have got the niece Mrs. Dalton spoke of—bound to be a stupid piece of millinery, if they have, living with Miss Blunsden. That would be worse than the two old ladies alone. Hang it, it would be just my luck if they had a girl of that kind staying with them."

It is a general trait of human nature that every man firmly believes himself to be the special object of the malevolence of Fortune. Every unexpected or expected mischance or inconvenience is hailed with the universal cry—"Just my luck."

Arnold arrived at his destination and was shown up into the drawing-room. The Misses Blunsden were seated there alone. They rose on his entrance, and Miss Hilda greeted him with effusion.

"We're so glad you've been able to come, Mr.

Robur; I assure you, we have been looking forward so much to seeing more of you, for you see we so seldom see young men here. Really, there are so few gentlemen we know living in Burnport, except some of the clergy of course: and I'm sorry to say that the vicar of our own parish is not at all a man we care to cultivate. Won't you sit down? It is so cold this evening that one is quite glad to have a fire." And Miss Hilda sank into a comfortable arm-chair in a cosy corner.

Robur had shaken hands with Miss Joanna during this address, and he now sat down, feeling exceedingly stupid; the only remark he could think of was a vague corroboration of Miss Blunsden's observations on the weather.

The handle of the door turned. "Dinner's ready, please, ma'am," thought Arnold, preparing to rise—but the expected words did not fall. He turned his face towards the door and—his heart gave a desperate jump as he recognised in glorious apparel the divinity who had been the unconscious object of his worship ever since he tumbled overboard by the beach.

"Ursula, dearest, this is Mr. Robur; our niece Miss Lorton, Mr. Robur."

Arnold felt horribly afraid that he was blushing; certainly he was very hot. A thrill of unadulterated bliss shot through him as he took

the firm soft hand the girl held out. "Oh, why doesn't it end here?" he thought; "if I could only go out like a candle, or turn into an eternal memory of this moment! Life will never be worth living after this." Outwardly, he was an ordinary young man saying a formal "how do you do." Under his dress-clothes the blood was reeling through his veins in more than Bacchic riot, as long as Miss Lorton's hand remained in his.

Doubtless it would be becoming to give some description of Ursula's attire, for the benefit of the ladies. But that is beyond the power of man. It was only to Arnold's love-deluded eyes that there was anything peculiarly splendid about the costume, which would have attracted no attention of itself, being of a very simple character. Nevertheless, Arnold fancied that if it were possible the wearer was now even more bewitching than in the plain black she wore out of doors. But then he was now face to face with his enchantress, and her graces were more palpably apparent than when she was taking her walks abroad, and only came into view for a few brief moments.

"Dinner's ready, please, ma'am." The summons really came this time, and Arnold, as in duty bound, presented his arm to Miss Blunsden, and the party descended to the dining-room.

Our hero's spirits had returned with a rush. He felt that his chambermaid's shortcomings

were excusable, and that his charges against his laundress were unjust. Had his worst enemy entered the room, he would have greeted him cheerfully, and looked upon him as a dear friend. Had any one done him a mortal injury, he would have forgiven him with a peaceful smile at that moment. He felt friendly to the whole world; nay, in his magnanimity he was conscious that if Miss Blunsden asked him to dinner every day for a fortnight, he would accept the invitation without a grumble.

It is to be noted that it did not occur to Arnold Robur that *this* state of affairs was "just his luck." His plate was laid on Miss Hilda's right, as that lady presided at the festal board: Miss Joanna sat at the other end of the table; and opposite him, straight opposite him, was Ursula.

The first article on the programme was an elaborate grace, delivered with becoming solemnity by Miss Blunsden. There is reason to fear that Arnold's mind was not as attentive as it might have been to the petitions for a blessing, and the thanksgiving "for the many who are less plentifully endowed," which made Miss Joanna indulge in a gesture of some impatience. He was too much occupied in giving inarticulate thanks for blessings which the fair Mother Superior knew not of.

“Well, Hilda, I must say I don’t feel thankful that there are others less bounteously provided for than ourselves,” commented the younger Miss Blunsden, when the grace was finished.

“My dear Joan,” said her sister, smiling sweetly, “you must surely see that it is most becoming and proper to return thanks for every mercy vouchsafed us.”

Joanna was obviously chafing at the other’s bland distortion of her meaning. Ursula broke in cheerfully in her defence.

“Why, Aunt Hilda, you surely aren’t glad that there are some people starving!”

Arnold thought he had never heard so delicious a voice.

“My dear child”—it seemed that Aunt Hilda was getting vexed—“if it is the merciful ordering of Providence that some people should have to be hungry, we should still be thankful.”

Arnold thought it time to break in. Miss Blunsden’s back seemed to be getting up, if such an expression may be applied to that chaste though elderly maiden.

“I don’t think any one who has heard some of the graces they still say in a few of the colleges at the ’Varsity would ever be discontented at anything he is likely to hear south of the Tweed,” he said. “To hear two old dons hammering away at alternate clauses for three minutes, or

scholars seeing how quickly they can reel off a yard of Latin, is more than human nature can stand, if reverence is to be expected. Have you ever visited Cambridge, Miss Lorton?"

"I was only there for a few hours once—during the Long Vacation, I suppose, for there seemed hardly anyone there."

"Ah, you should have been in the May-week, when the races are on. Ladies manage to get up an astonishing amount of enthusiasm about those races, I find; but I have a private suspicion that what they enjoy most is to see an upset."

"We can see that sometimes without going to Cambridge for it, Mr. Robur." There was a little ripple in the girl's voice which made Arnold blush rather unexpectedly.

"Well yes,—I'm afraid I made an example of myself the other day; and I suspect you saw me, Miss Lorton."

Oh Arnold Robur! Arnold Robur! If women are hypocrites, what may not men be. "I suspect you saw me"—as if your whole conduct ever since hadn't been guided by your positive knowledge of the fact!

But Ursula was not to be outdone.

"Oh! was that you I saw on the beach?" quoth she demurely.

"Confound it, she might have let me think

she recognised me," thought Arnold, "but that's a privilege I don't deserve."

Here Aunt Hilda broke in: her attention having hitherto been centred on the fish which she had been demolishing.

"Dear me, Mr. Robur, I hope you didn't have an accident? You should really be careful; someone told me you weren't very strong."

"My accident was not of a serious nature, Miss Blunsden. I had been indulging in a sail, and as I wasn't attending to my business when we ran ashore, I was tumbled overboard and got a ducking. But sea-water is wholesome, and I haven't suffered any evil consequences, I assure you."

"Oh, but are you quite sure, Mr. Robur? I know I heard you cough, when you came into the house."

"That's chronic," said Robur, laughing. "I've had a cough for the last eight years or so, and I never found it did me any harm. A real thorough-going churchyard cough is the safest thing in the world. It doesn't hurt, and really if it didn't make so many people anxious to give me 'something which was sure to cure me at once,' I should rather like it than otherwise. My lungs are as sound as a bell."

Miss Hilda's face assumed an expression of serious concern. "Dear me," she said, "that

sounds very bad. I don't like to hear of young people who do that sort of thing. Are you sure you haven't been made worse by your accident? I don't think you're looking very well. Now, when I am out of sorts, I find a little light medicine is always a great assistance." Miss Blunsden's air was a curious combination of contented cheerfulness and sympathetic anxiety. "Would you be so good as to carve this for me?"

Arnold promptly assumed the knife and fork and set to work on the fowl before him. "Please don't begin by getting alarmed about me," he said, when this business was satisfactorily completed, "I don't deserve any sort of sympathy."

"Aunt Hilda is a very skilful physician, Mr. Robur: hadn't you better submit yourself to her treatment?" said Ursula, smiling.

Robur said to himself that he had no notion how bewitching her face really was till he saw that smile. It was one of those smiles which few even of the loveliest girls can boast: a smile which seems to belong only to the particular person on whom it is bestowed, "making his life splendid with a memory;" so that it seems incredible that a similar one should ever be granted to any one else. Conscious coquetry has no weapon to be compared to this, the charm of which lies very much in its unconsciousness.

But it inspires the highly-favoured recipient with a yearning to thrust a knife into the vitals of any man who has the audacity to speak to the lady who bestowed it.

Miss Blunsden's temper was thoroughly restored by her niece's judicious compliment: she purred like a cat when it attains to the highest feline felicity, which, if we may judge by appearances, is more perfect than that enjoyed by any other animal, man not being excepted.

"I wish you would," she murmured; "if I may say so, I really believe Ursula is right. I have been the instrument by which a number of cures have been wrought. Some people believe in quinine, Mr. Robur, but I have never found it nearly so efficacious as the medicine I am in the habit of recommending."

"Did you ever try quinine?" quoth Joanna with some sharpness.

"Joanna, dearest, I know your weakness on this subject. I say nothing against quinine, but I cannot think it is to be compared to my medicine. But I am ready to appeal to Mr. Robur. Let me persuade you to try it, Mr. Robur, and I am sure it will do you all the good in the world."

Miss Hilda's voice was persuasive, but Arnold was not to be beguiled. He had been forced to try too many nauseous compounds already by

anxious friends, and he knew as well as possible that there was no reason whatever for drugging himself. He sheltered himself under a mean subterfuge.

"I fear," he said, smiling, "that I should not be a competent judge of the comparative merits of the panaceas. I have never given quinine a fair trial."

"Six drops taken three times a day just before meals in half a wine-glass of water, and a double dose when you go to bed, would cure you in a month, I am sure," said Miss Hilda: *not* referring to the medicine he named.

"You might give a month's trial to each, you know," suggested Ursula, "or take them turn about for a few weeks."

"My dear," said her aunt seriously, "I don't think that plan would do at all. I have never tried it among my poor."

Arnold seized the opportunity to turn the conversation.

"I hope Saint Guthlac's altar-cloth is progressing favourably," he said. "Does Miss Lorton take her due share in these labours for the spiritual enlightenment of the lower orders?"

"I don't fancy I could enlighten the lower orders much, Mr. Robur, if you mean the poor people; at least not in Aunt Hilda's way. I

haven't the necessary gift for artistic embroidery," said Ursula, her eyes lighting up again with the divine smile.

"I wish," said the downright Joanna from her end of the table, "that people would give up talking about the lower orders, as if they were an inferior part of creation. I don't think it's right."

"*Peccavi*," said Arnold; "I was wrong in doing so, I admit. But it is one of those forms of expression one gets into the habit of using, without thinking what they mean. I must try and get out of it."

Miss Hilda was crumbling her bread and rolling it into little pills unconsciously, a sure sign that she did not agree with the remarks that were going on.

"Joanna, dearest," she said, with a suspicion of tartness in her voice, "I cannot understand why you are always quarrelling with the arrangements it has pleased Providence to make. We have been divided into classes, some higher and some lower, and it is my opinion, whatever that may be worth, that we should be thankful that we are placed in a higher sphere than some of our fellow-men; and should rather labour to teach our humbler brethren to be contented with their lot, than seek to raise up misguided ideas of equality in them. And I am sure that

is what the catechism of our dear ancestral Church teaches us." And Miss Blunsden closed her mouth, after this little oration, with a click, as who should say, "That settles the question, I rather think."

"If they're to be thankful for their poverty, we shall have to teach them a good deal, I expect," said Joanna brusquely.

Ursula thought it was time to break in.

"Surely we aren't going against the Church catechism if we want people to try and better themselves," she said. "It doesn't follow that they are 'called' to just the state of life they were born in, Aunt Hilda. Isn't there such a thing as a right ambition?"

"We want them to improve their condition," said Arnold, "but we don't want them to strive after the impossible, or expect a state of society where every one is equal all round, because that would involve equality of brains, which no state enactments are very likely to produce. But surely we needn't regard them as inferior creatures."

Miss Blunsden met this combined attack with fortitude: even with a smile. "Dear me, Mr. Robur," she replied, "I am surprised to find you taking up these radical ideas, and actually supporting my sister! But things have changed since my young days. It positively makes me

feel angry sometimes, the rude way the boys behave, never touching their caps to their superiors or anything. But I have said my say." The good lady's magnanimity was doubtless due in part to the presence of a guest, who unluckily did not take her part.

Miss Lorton, however, thought it was time to change the subject.

"I am very remiss," she said, "I have never asked after Grace Dalton yet, Mr. Robur. How is she?"

The question led to a general discussion about the Daltons, mingled with reminiscences of the old Brighton days, which employed the company pretty fully till dinner was finished.

"Ursula, child, aren't you going to give us some music?" suggested Aunt Joan, after they had been seated some while in the drawing-room. "I hope you are a musician, Mr. Robur."

Arnold admitted that he had been known to play and sing, and that he held music generally in high esteem.

"Now do you know I never could understand that enthusiasm for music?" said Aunt Hilda. "Of course I think it's very nice in its proper place, but I never could care for it in the way some people seem to. There is nothing I like better than a Gregorian, but as for these songs everybody sings, I don't see the beauty in them."

“Oh, Aunt Hilda!” said Ursula. “Don’t believe her, Mr. Robur; she is very fond of them. I believe they help her to go to sleep.”

“Come, Ursula, don’t keep your aunt waiting,” said Joanna: and the elder Miss Blunsden subsided with a placid smile.

“Let us have that new song of yours, my dear. It ought to be new to Mr. Robur.”

So the piano was prepared and Ursula sang, while Arnold sat enraptured.

“THY HEART TO MINE, LOVE.”

I.

Thy heart to mine, Love,
What if storms are wild?
My heart to thine, Love,
Fiercest gales are mild.
Thy heart to mine, Love,
Suns shine o’erhead;
My heart to thine, Love,
Soft paths are spread.

II.

Thy heart to mine, Love,
Sorrows flee away;
My heart to thine, Love,
Labour turns to play.
Thy heart to mine, Love,
Peace comes for strife:
My heart to thine, Love,
Death turns to Life.

When the infatuated admirer heard that song, he thought there never was, and never could

be, another to equal it, from which the depth of his infatuation may easily be gathered. However, he was not permitted simply to sit and adore ; he was promptly summoned to take his own share in the entertainment. He sang, and played : he even had the ineffable bliss of playing for Ursula when she sang again—this time a song which was known to him. Miss Lorton, to his great satisfaction, restricted herself to singing English songs ; for somehow, when we hear a human voice, however divine the melody, we prefer to know what the words are about ; and there are not many English damsels who can sing German or Italian songs intelligibly, even for the ears of linguists. However, seeing how few of the said damsels can sing an English song intelligibly, perhaps they are justified in confining their attentions to foreign words. Then they can at least aver that it is the ignorance of their audience which makes them unintelligible ; and the audience, fearing the accusation, will give double applause.

So the evening passed pleasantly enough, till Arnold felt that he must tear himself away. With heartfelt expressions of gratitude for a very delightful entertainment, he withdrew ; leaving an important vital organ behind him, metaphorically ; and actually feeling the said organ

thump exceedingly hard when he bade "good night" to Miss Lorton, and for the second time that evening felt her hand rest in his for one brief moment.

He went out, and almost mechanically lighted a cigar, to see himself home with. He looked up at the moon which was looking down on terrestrial proceedings with a broad grin on her face: and felt tempted in vague exhilaration to offer the chaste goddess a weed: but he refrained. The incense of his own tobacco he considered might suffice, and render her propitious. He went down, and leaned over the railings that topped the sea-wall, and looked out on the great sheet of darkness, with one glorious band of silver gleaming across it, and watched the tiny ripples curling and sparkling in the moonlight: and as he gazed, he thought over the last three hours. What an evening! Any man who has spent four years at Cambridge is bound to have had some pleasant evenings; and Arnold had had his share—but never one like this before. This was another matter altogether. Somehow, it seemed to take him out of himself: to raise him to a new and purer sphere of being. And Ursula! was there ever, could there ever have been another girl like her, or comparable to her? Arnold's soul was filled with thanksgiving to Paston for sending him down to Burnport. His

mind recurred to that conversation with his friend at Oakleigh. Classify the devil? No need now. "The devil is routed permanently," thought our hero in the exhilaration of his heart. "See what Burnport would do for me? Oh, Robert Paston, if you only knew! Burnport has done for me altogether." If he was somewhat sanguine as to the surrender of the Prince of Darkness, he may be excused.

When he had gazed and pondered his fill—or to speak more correctly, when he became too conscious that the air was cool, to go on gazing and pondering comfortably, he turned his steps regretfully homeward to his hotel.

"For one more smile like that," said Arnold, as he blew out his candle and turned into bed an hour or so afterwards, "for one more smile like that, I would—by Jove, I would turn crossing-sweeper."

CHAPTER XIII.

A WALK.

“But he had felt the power
Of Nature, and already was prepared
By his intense conceptions, to receive
Deeply the lesson deep of love which he
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive.”—*The Excursion*.

ARNOLD allowed two or three days to elapse before he again paid a visit at the house on East Rise. They were days of almost insufferable length and boredom, and he was at that stage when absence from the beloved object seems to be sheer waste of time, an impious refusal to take the good that is provided. Especially is this the case when it is actually difficult to avoid contact from the provoking proximity of the enjoyment which must be temporarily eschewed. Nevertheless, the laws of polite society, wholesome or unwholesome, appear as plainly written upon the hearts of all right-minded persons as that significant warning

upon the palace wall at Babylon which robbed a certain historical banquet of its conviviality. Full many a time in the course of our lives banquets are set before us too, but warned by these laws (and perhaps others besides) we may not touch the viands and continue without reproach. There is a death's-head, do what we will, to spoil the feast, and the name of it is Decorum. Translating into plain English, a young gentleman is expected to return the hospitality of his entertainers by a call, but is not to presume on the strength of a mere invitation to dinner that any desire for his company at all times and seasons is thereby intimated. For which text, together with due illustrations and corollaries, *vide* Etiquette Books.

Now, inasmuch as love is an uncertain thing, not unfrequently susceptible of the longer form of spelling known as infatuation, it may be doubted whether such artificially compulsory furloughs away from its service are likely to end in results of undiluted benefit. A shrewd and influential writer once remarked with cynical candour that marriage was a lottery. That is doubtless true enough in the case of the million. But why should it be so? Is such a state of things so satisfactory that all can contentedly acquiesce in it? There is an aristocracy of love, however, whose members have good reason for

their mutual affinities and selections, even though they know it not. These have enjoyed many opportunities of witnessing the behaviour of their future mates before they dare palter with tremendous oaths of faith and constancy. They are in no haste for the livelong misery of contentious strife when no discoveries can separate them more; knowing that, in whatever sense "marriages are made in heaven," there is neither marriage nor divorce for the soul which has never truly loved, and that to love we must in some measure understand. If the tests of a well-trying affection are less frequent they must be more crucial, and thus love be purged by a fiery ordeal of its own from the dross of a first sight fancy.

"And we've never been there yet," Miss Joanna was saying as Arnold was announced and entered the room.

"It seems I have chosen an unlucky time to call," said he, after a few words. "You were speaking of going somewhere; let me come in another day." To lose the chance altogether of a glimpse of Ursula after he had waited so patiently for it would have been too hard.

"Oh no, Mr. Robur, thank you; we have been out to-day. Aunt Joan was only talking about the caves at Marchland, we want to see them so much. But I dare say you have been

there in your boat, and can tell us all about the place."

He had not even heard the name, and besought for further information. "My intimacy with the coast, though a pretty close one with a spot in it not a hundred miles away, is not so extensive as you suppose, Miss Lorton."

She laughed. It was a treat to hear Ursula's laugh; there was not the least suspicion of excitement or nervous exaggeration about it. You felt sure that the laughter was just as capable of feeling other emotions, it was so sincere and sympathetic. Arnold would have craftily dissembled his knowledge of any and every subject if he could have got an account of it from her lips by so doing.

Miss Hilda was not present, and Aunt Joan was knitting a comforter for one of her Sunday scholars with an abstracted air, so he was able to confine his attention exclusively to Ursula as she continued.

"Marchland is a little fishing village along the coast about ten miles from here, and there are caves there,—very large ones,—covering about two acres, I believe. Then there is an old church, and the ruins of a castle,—a much better one than our castle here, they say; and from all accounts it must be a charming place. People go over there for picnics

sometimes in the summer, but nobody goes in the winter."

"Well," remarked Aunt Joan, "we must get over there by hook or crook, Ursula, before the tourist season comes round again."

"Why not by sea," said Arnold, "and let me be your escort?"

Ursula clapped her hands. "That is indeed a happy thought, Mr. Robur," she cried enthusiastically. "Wouldn't you like that, Aunt Joan? You often say how you wish you could go for a sail."

In Aunt Joan's bosom, however, the usual conflict was being fought between her own and other people's likings, with the usual result.

"My dear," she replied, a little troubled at disappointing Ursula, "as far as I am concerned, very little tempting would make me burden Mr. Robur with the responsibility of looking after two troublesome females for a whole day; but we must not forget your Aunt Hilda, and I feel quite sure that she would never trust herself upon the sea with only a plank between her and destruction. What's more to the purpose, she would never allow us to run the risk alone, and there wouldn't be much pleasure for her if she came with us."

Ursula could not help smiling at the idea of asking the Mother Superior of the Guild of St.

Guthlac to adventure her future capacity for ministering to the spiritually destitute within the narrow compass of a frail cockle-shell, as any sea-going craft below the dimensions of a first-class man-of-war was held to be in that lady's estimation. Some young ladies might have thought it prettier to pout, or drum pettishly with their feet. But Ursula was an orphan, and had not been spoiled, so there was some excuse for her ignorance of such endearing little arts.

"We could not leave poor dear Aunt Hilda behind, she is so fond of old ruins and churches," was all she said.

"Certainly not," said Arnold promptly; "but that needn't prevent our seeing all there is to be seen at Marchland. If you will allow me, I will arrange for our transport by land. Miss Blunsden will not mind a carriage, I suppose, if the horses are steady; and I will make that my special care."

When it appeared that Aunt Hilda could have no possible objection to this mode of conveyance, it was settled that Arnold should call for them all with a suitable vehicle the next morning, if fine; and Aunt Joan undertook to provide a hamper for their lunch in the caves.

Wonderful to relate, the morrow, though it did not bring with it a cloudless sky, was yet

amply favourable for the little expedition. Arnold studied the weather forecast while he sat at breakfast; and seeing that a cyclone had been prophesied with customary meteorological malevolence for that very day, concluded quite reasonably that all the required conditions had been satisfied. When the comfortable landau which he had ordered, drawn by two stout horses, made its appearance, he flung himself into it with an easy conscience, and was speedily at East Rise.

Fortune was clearly on his side, for Miss Hilda was not ready, and could by no means be persuaded to start for another hour. Some specimens of embroidery were undergoing inspection, and it was highly important that the select Committee which was sitting in judgment upon them should not be hurried to any premature decision.

It was no use, Aunt Joan said, attempting to tell Miss Hilda that the carriage was waiting, for she knew it already, and had locked herself up in the drawing-room with the other like-minded people, refusing to listen to any application from outside; and Miss Joanna calculated that it would be wise to allow a full hour for the sitting to continue.

“All women, you know,” she said to Arnold, “and can’t bring themselves to make up their

minds about a single point, even when they can see it; it's a perfect female College of Cardinals."

Arnold was so tickled by the notion of this mysterious society that the refractory conduct of its prime mover, or ecclesiastical "Number One," did not affect him, and this made Ursula's disconsolate face brighten.

"The horses shall go back to the stables for an hour," said he. "I will walk on, with your permission, and let you catch me up. Miss Blunsden deserves my thanks for giving me the opportunity to stretch my legs."

"I don't see why you shouldn't get a walk too, my dear," said that thoughtless old Aunt Joan; and the upshot was that these two young people actually went forth *alone*, and trudged along together for four miles without any one thinking any harm.

Oh but Joanna was made to suffer finely for this piece of imprudence. One would have taken Miss Blunsden to be an experienced matron with grown-up children of her own from the severe way in which she handled her indiscreet junior.

"I do declare you might be the careless, giddy creature you used to be thirty years ago, my dear Joanna, instead of a sober woman of the world."

“Well, Hilda, you know I always do something wrong when you are not by; you shouldn’t lock yourself up when visitors come.”

Meanwhile the young man and maiden were footing it briskly over the rain-washed roads, the fresh breeze quickening their blood, and making their talk as unrestrained as its own swift current. Who of us has not made experience of days when all Nature seemed to exhibit its unity in some new and striking manner for our behoof? When we are permeated by a sense of communion with every natural object we can see or feel: when the heart swells with exultation for its affinity to every living organism in this great Universe, and the soul grows large and comprehensive: when the stranger whom one meets and passes, never to behold again, is no stranger, but a silent, unrecognised brother, and one is bound to the casual companion at one’s side by closest kinship. And yet this personal connexion is but a part, and a small part, of the eternal shock and surprise of that revelation of indivisibility which all things at such times have, as it were, upon their lips to tell, and which the least hint of a responsive attitude on the part of deaf and blind humanity could, as it seems, evoke in an articulate *Te Deum*.

The open country, and the beloved presence,

had an effect on Arnold such as he had never felt since he became a man, and never before in its fulness. The crowded atmosphere of streets and rooms was gone; his individuality was lost in the greater, the encircling Individuality; he was in the glow of the light "shed largely round" which transfigures the dwellers in heaven, and makes every change of conditions familiar, every place and society homelike. He could never have imagined the figure of Ursula would seem so accidental and unnecessary, and yet he doubted whether he should have lived the last few moments but for her. In truth the impulse to lay down their parts as principals, and become subordinates in the universal pageant was upon them both. Their souls merged in the surrounding interfusion of soul, they became immortal for a space, and unmoved beheld divine mysteries—till the sound of wheels disturbed them from their trance, and turned them back to clay. By this time the sky had become clouded, and when they reached their destination they found themselves confined to the caves by a heavy downpour of rain.

"Never mind," said Ursula, "there is enough to see here for one day."

After lunch they explored the gloomy and fantastic region by the aid of candles supplied by an old woman who lived in a hut at the

entrance, and who led, or rather misled, the party through the strange labyrinth. Aunt Joan asked her how she accounted for the existence of the caves; but this was a point upon which she preserved a happy impartiality.

“Some says the sea washed ’un out, leddy, and some thinks the early Chris’uns did it; least-ways, I’ve heerd my feyther say the smugglers used to come here to hide up.”

She spoke of the early Christians as if they were a kind of extinct vegetable,—not unlike early potatoes, or spring onions.

At last they came to the remains of what seemed an extremely massive door of oak and iron which still held its own in spite of the ravages of decay. A large part of the centre had succumbed, however, and in its place was an iron wicket heavily padlocked.

“Ye mun ask the parson aboot that,” said the old woman in answer to the questions put to her by the visitors. “It leads into the church, that way does; but I can’t let ye through.”

They had been referred to the parson so often during their perambulation, and were so anxious to know more about the caves, that Arnold resolved to see what he could do for them, and set off for the village through the rain at a run.

The clergyman was a courtly old man, full of curious learning of the old-world sort, and very

much thrown away upon his poor little parish, Arnold thought.

He was glad to make the acquaintance of such gentle strangers, and wrapped himself in his cloak at once in order to ascend the hill. He was a bit of an antiquarian, he told Arnold on the way, and had a patriotic pride in the ruins and remains of the neighbourhood.

The ladies were agreeably surprised that Arnold should have accomplished his object so soon, and extremely grateful to the venerable clergyman for leaving his warm fireside to place himself at their service in such weather.

"The atmosphere in these ancient caves is always soft and equable," said he in mild deprecation; "the temperature never varies here, whatever it may do outside. For years I have kept a thermometer here which always stands at the same level."

He showed them where it was in a dark corner, and then opened the wicket in the old door to lead them into the artificial passage beyond.

"It runs under the churchyard," said he, as they passed through it, "and at the time it was made was the only entrance to the caves. The place by which you entered was probably made by outlaws to whom the original opening was barred by the gate; and it bears marks of having been built up and pulled down again since. A

useful citadel this must have been for the monks of the Priory above in case of raids made upon them by neighbouring barons."

Opening another more modern door, he conducted them into the church, an irregular Saxon structure, not without its few poor anomalous attempts at restoration. It was but a remnant of the spacious fane in which the holy fathers had once worshipped, so its pastor told them; and from a window they could see the traces of crumbled foundations on every side.

"The rest of the church, and the monastery to which it was attached," said their guide; and bade them mark the castle, which seemed to be about a mile away, across a dip in the hills.

The caves felt quite warm when they retraced their steps, and left the cold church. The wicket had just been closed behind them when Aunt Hilda remarked, with a sigh which almost extinguished her candle, that life was too busy now to admit of romance.

"On the contrary, madam," said the clergyman, "is it not owing to the picturesque imagination of us moderns that the past has in many of its phases been rekindled? The life led by monk and confessor, knight and fair lady, was, I suspect, at least as dull and sordid as our own, though the fancy of the historian has loved to bestow upon it a rosy apotheosis of which they

could have had no premonition. In like manner, I do not doubt, we shall be objects of romantic interest to our descendants when our prosaic self-importance has been long forgotten. That very door," he continued, touching it with his hand, "has a tragic story of its own, and has survived to witness its development into the soothing unreality of legend."

As he expressed his willingness to satisfy their anxiety for farther information, he brought them to a more open spot where the roof widened into a kind of dome, and showed them rude ledges in the rock, forming no uncomfortable resting-place. Here they were soon disposed: Aunt Hilda first tying a silk handkerchief over her head to keep away the cobwebs. Ursula chose a place next Aunt Joan where she could make a pillow of her shoulder, while Arnold occupied a recess from which he could observe the girl's face, and study the emotions it exhibited. The clergyman paced up and down the sandy floor, sometimes resting himself upon a boulder in the midst.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OMEN.

“That pitee renneth sone in gentil herte,
Feling his similitude in peynes smerte,
Is preued al-day, as men may it see,
As well by werk as by auctoritee.”—*Chaucer*.

The Legend of the Caves.

“I HAVE said that the caves are ancient,” their guide began, in a measured, self-communing tone;—indeed, his air throughout the following recital was that of one lost in thought, as if the associations for ever imprisoned in those wrinkled walls and frowning chasms had overpowered his consciousness of other things, and summoned of themselves the words that fell half involuntarily from his mouth.

“So ancient are they,” he continued, “that their origin is lost in obscurity, and all that we can say of it is but vain surmising. And yet the load of earth and rock that rises more than sixty feet above has weighed less heavily

“ upon them throughout their age of years than
“ the dark tale of guilt and rage that blackens
“ this subterranean gloom, making its warm
“ shelter deadly. The graveyard outside is full
“ of human bones disinterred from time to time
“ within this place ; nor have the last, in all
“ probability, yet come to light. No man had
“ covered them with earth, though man first
“ robbed these stones of innocence, and converted
“ the kindly refuge into an accidental charnel-
“ house. Nature, outraged but forgiving, took
“ upon herself the task ; and with her shifting
“ surface accomplished their slow obsequies. The
“ grass on the hill-top is rank with the venom of
“ frightful deeds that permeates everywhere
“ around. The knots swell with its curdled
“ essence ; its violent course throbs fiercely along
“ the seams.

“ The deed of which I tell took place some
“ six or seven centuries ago,—no matter when.
“ It is a long time back, but the caves were old
“ even then. The monastery to which my church
“ belonged was a thriving and a splendid insti-
“ tution. Most men of note or power in the
“ State were churchmen, in the narrow sense, at
“ that time ; even the authority of the sceptre
“ was disputed by that of Rome, and a single
“ cowl was often worth many coronets. Thus
“ the colony of monks at Marchland possessed

“ the temporal allegiance of all who came within
“ their ken as an appanage of their spiritual
“ authority. The prior to whose administration
“ my story has given a peculiar interest was
“ known as far as most reputations could spread
“ in those days to be a man of the strictest
“ sanctity and discipline. Heaven be thanked,
“ men’s characters are now more closely scru-
“ tinized before they are entrusted with the
“ guardianship of others’ eternal welfare. He
“ was of noble blood,—the chief recommendation
“ for such a post, apart from ecclesiastical pro-
“ minence. His brother had been lord of the
“ castle on the next height, the only other house
“ of importance in that part of the country. But
“ he was dead, and his widow, the stately lady
“ of Marchland, managed her estates alone, and
“ ruled her serfs and villeins with an iron rod.
“ One child, and that a daughter, had been the
“ only offspring of the marriage. Her attractions,
“ it is said, were of so rare an order that no
“ youth could be found worthy of companionship
“ with such a mate, and she was destined by her
“ mother to bestow the wealth which would
“ descend to her upon the Church, as well as to
“ take the veil herself. Nor was the maid un-
“ willing for such an espousal,—at least to out-
“ ward seeming. So pliant was her disposition
“ in the matter that her mother’s careful watch

“ was relaxed. She was allowed to visit un-
“ attended a bower in a hollow near the confines
“ of the priory lands as often as she would, and
“ thither she used to carry her books of devotion
“ when the days were long and mild. Some-
“ times her mother would follow, and share her
“ solitude, but more frequently the cares of
“ management detained her after her lord’s
“ death, and she could seldom spare the time for
“ contemplation.

“ Women were little able to hold their own
“ in those rude times ; strong minds were scarcely
“ better than the weakest when the appeal was
“ made to force. Shrewd and courageous as the
“ lady of Marchland was, there was one power
“ with which it was impossible for her to cope.
“ Unfortunately that power was a neighbouring
“ one ; it was the monastery. Attacks by such
“ institutions upon their neighbours’ rights were
“ not improbable or unknown.

“ Founded to protect the weak, they often
“ themselves became oppressors. Defiance of
“ the laws was tempting when it was easy to sin
“ against them with impunity, and men whose
“ office it was to supplement the deficiencies of
“ the written code by works of charity and mercy
“ lived securely in the habit of law-breaking,
“ when a layman might have been punished for
“ much less.

“For people in the country to communicate
“their grievances to the Court was a course beset
“with difficulties, especially when the suit affected
“the interests of the clergy. The emissaries of
“the party from whom redress was sought would
“not be idle. Their superior influence would
“give them the advantage, and it was unlikely
“that the great ecclesiastics by whom the king
“was surrounded would decide against members
“of their own body. Such was the position in
“which the proud mistress of the castle was
“placed by the encroachments of monastic arro-
“gance. One night the fence separating twenty
“acres of rich pasture from the priory was thrown
“down, and when the lady’s herdsmen attempted
“to drive their cattle on to the ground next
“morning they were repulsed by armed retainers
“of the monastery. There was but one course
“open, and the lady hurried to the prior, informed
“him of the act of violence and trespass com-
“mitted by his servants, and demanded punish-
“ment for the offenders, with restitution for
“herself. Indignation made her incoherent,
“and the smooth priest listened with a faint
“smile that was half a sneer playing about his
“lips.

“‘Peace, daughter ; calm yourself,’ he said at
“last, when she paused. ‘If Holy Church
“requires the few acres you say were yours, is

“not Her word enough, and would you hesitate
“to freely offer them?’

“‘You claim them as your right, then, and
“take upon yourself the guilt of the marauders?’
“she replied, incensed by his cool villainy. ‘The
“land was verily mine, as all know, before you
“robbed it from me. Show me your claim, holy
“father, if you would have me render up my
“own.’

“The prior lost his self-control; there was no
“one by to see.

“‘Woman,’ he cried, and upon his brow there
“settled a menacing expression, ‘ask to see our
“claim at your peril. Try to force it from us,
“and your ruin shall be speedy. Your vassals
“shall have licence to pillage and cheat you;
“none shall owe you service or money payment;
“even the weak protection of the law shall not
“avail in your behalf. Urge me not to extremi-
“ties with vain complaints, but go hence humbly
“accepting the justice that has been done.’

“Before the threat of excommunication the
“lady cowered, and shrank back. The monk,
“seeing his advantage, pursued it.

“‘Strong measures are for heretics and bar-
“barians, not for delicate ladies,’ he continued,
“allowing the smile to revisit the corners of his
“mouth, ‘and you will not, I trust, court our
“unwilling anathema. Were it not pity to let

“folly go further, and then perhaps come off no better? Consider with yourself, and be advised.’

“Thereupon he turned to his breviary, and the lady, struggling with baffled rancour, remained silent for awhile. When she spoke again it was with altered mien, and her voice had in it a ring of cunningly assumed dejection.

“‘Your words are sharp, father, but they are merited. If the Church demand aught from me must I not straight give it up? Then pardon my rebellious spirit, and my late amends. The notice has been brief, and I was unprepared. But now that I comply, may the sacrifice win me favour when it is most needed.’

“The lady had made up her mind, and her submission was but feigned. As soon as she reached home a secret messenger was despatched to the sub-prior, entreating him for his intimacy with the family at the castle to be present there with the least possible delay.

“Father Silvester had been a courtier in former days, and there were whispers of his dissolute behaviour before he deserted the world for the cloister. Now, however, he had embraced the rigid austerity of his Order with the fervour of a convert; indeed, he seemed to burn with the desire to make his unquenchable zeal outshine even that of his superior. But if the gay trickery of the gallant no longer clothed his

“ exterior, the coarse monkish dress covered a
“ heart still agitated with intrigue, and bursting
“ with ambitious schemes for his own advance-
“ ment. Had there been any scandal against the
“ prior, Silvester was the one man who would
“ have been sure to know and treasure it. He
“ had risen fast to the second post in the little
“ community, and that only made him the more
“ eager to fill the first place. It was a grievance
“ to him that another should be his superior at
“ all, and the very fact of superiority made the
“ possessor of it his enemy. Self-seeking had
“ become with him so invincible a passion that
“ the single word *jealousy* might stand for a
“ definition of his whole character, since all the
“ rest was show.

“ Long was he closeted with the lady of the
“ castle on that ill-omened day. His arrival and
“ departure were managed with such secrecy that
“ no one could have formed any suspicion which
“ might some day be communicated to the monks.
“ When he returned by a long circuit to the priory,
“ it was with difficulty that he repressed the
“ signs of malicious triumph betrayed by his
“ excited looks and unwonted colour. ‘ Silence,’
“ he said to himself ; ‘ a little longer, and he will
“ be drawn into the net, and then my path is
“ clear.’

“ As soon as he was composed he sought the

“prior, and conferred with him about one of the
“brethren, a youth who had entered the mon-
“astery at a tender age, and was employed in the
“Scriptorium at the work of transcribing, a good
“decipherer of glosses, and skilled in the miniature
“of Horæ.

“‘A worthy librarian to succeed our venerable
“Brother Roger,’ said the prior. ‘What ails the
“young man?—I know him well.’

“‘Holy Father,’ replied the other, ‘you must
“know that he has become much shrunk of late,
“so that we almost doubt whether he be not a
“prey to some slow inward malady. So useful a
“member of our fraternity can ill be spared, and
“I humbly crave he may be absolved from
“domestic duties for a season, and have licence
“to wander in the open air at will to recover his
“youthful strength.’

“This speech had the intended effect. The
“young brother was summoned before his elders,
“and when the prior saw that he looked pale
“and spiritless he bade him refresh himself with
“bodily exercise, leaving the Scriptorium for a
“period of recreation.

“The object of this solicitude could not but be
“surprised by so novel a display of interest. He
“had been mouldering among the books for years,
“till it seemed as though his skin were suffering
“a transformation into parchment, and the gall

“of bitterness, mixing with his blood, were turning it to ink. And yet these two holy men had taken no thought of him all the time. Temporary relief—nay, who knows but permanent freedom—had come at last, then ; and he was glad at heart ; that heart which was yet to know what it meant to leap for joy within a liberated body. It seemed all too dreamlike to be true. Was he actually to behold and revel in the luxury of leisure and freedom while still in the flesh ? He had always thought—in his calm moments, when he was quiet and reasonable—that this was some deferred hope only to be fulfilled in the eternal future of the spirit. The body must first be crushed by long labour and imprisonment, and the soul perform its journey through the land of the Dark Shadow, before fruition of the hope might be achieved. So had the iron entered into his soul. Was it not unnatural (he had asked himself) to expect anything different ? The spirit was entombed within its carnal shell ; in like manner was life here entombment, and this world a shroud. Did not the Apostle mean this when he said that the real life was hidden ?

“He had not always thought these things ; there were other moods,—moods which patience had made less frequent. Now, however, the old feelings revived. He could remember

“nothing before his novitiate at the priory. He
“was so young when he was brought there that
“he had never known how it came about. That
“was in the time of the old prior and sub-prior.
“He recollected them well. They had been kind
“to him, and for a while he was happy. The
“consciousness of his position had not dawned
“upon him. It came only too surely in the end,
“that cruel awakening; and he had understood
“how the vows taken in ignorance must be binding upon him for life. ‘Hush,’ he had often
“whispered to himself when the voice which told
“him so would echo wildly through his soul; ‘it
“will kill me; I must silence it, or resolve not
“to listen.’ He had pored over the Scriptures,
“but it was labour in vain; they did not counsel
“his incarceration in that hateful trap. The
“Lombard’s *Sentences* could not reconcile him to
“his fate; the *Consolation* of Boetius had no consolation for him. But now in a moment the
“possibility of happiness had come. He longed
“once more for the world outside; the world of
“chivalry and stirring action; the world of human
“intercourse and human love, without which that
“other were impossible; he would taste it all
“before he died.

“There was nothing fresh or striking in the
“yearnings that almost tore his breast asunder,
“and he knew it well. Others had endured the

“ same before him, some fighting nobly till the
“ fiend’s suggestions were overcome, and they
“ could wait in peaceful resignation for their
“ souls’ enfranchisement. But few had experi-
“ enced the sweets of living as it had been his
“ lot to do at rare and stolen intervals. Once or
“ twice a month his steps had strayed, when
“ observation was impossible, to the bower in
“ the hollow. Already he knew its lovely occu-
“ pant, and her image between these visits never
“ left him, till, goaded by its poignant spell, he
“ felt that to look upon her was mad transport,
“ to embrace her would be worth the having
“ lived.

“ Latterly, however, he had realised some-
“ thing of the blank despair which must be the
“ end of such empty self-delusion ; it was from
“ grief of this that he had pined, and lost his
“ bloom. But at the prior’s words prudence was
“ in one instant gone, and every day he found
“ occasion to hold soft communing with the saint
“ who was enthroned within his heart. So the
“ hours of happiness slipped by, the last that
“ were to fall to those twain upon earth. He
“ had chafed under the enforced concealment of
“ his wooing, and prayed earnestly for the day
“ on which he might proclaim his love before the
“ world. What must have been his elation,
“ therefore, when the term was put to their

“sweet privacy. The morrow would see them
“free to wed, and live their lives in the sunshine
“of that sacred tie.

“They had planned flight for the next morn-
“ing early, while it was dusk. She was to leave
“the castle while its inmates slept, and meet
“him at the creek near the village below. There
“a boat would be in readiness, and with sails
“and oars they would betake them whither they
“could not be traced.

“ ‘My jewels will keep us till we reach a place
“of safety,’ she had said, ‘and we must look to
“Heaven to do the rest.’ Then he told her that
“he too was not quite penniless, and showed the
“stone which he wore underneath, suspended
“from his neck. ‘That must go last,’ he said,
“ ‘for it is a charm, and hallowed.’ But she paid
“little heed, and scarcely looked at it. They
“agreed to land at a spot not far from Burnport,
“and take horse thence to the capital. It was
“growing late when he bade her god-speed, and
“left the bower. As he did so he fancied two
“figures were moving rapidly away from him
“among the trees in the little copse. One of
“them might be a woman ; and the other wore
“the garb which he was soon to abjure. But he
“was occupied with his new hopes, and recked
“not of other things. Doubtless the vision of
“himself with his beloved one, impressed upon

“ his brain, had conjured itself into being there
“ before his eyes.

“ Time presses, and my story is a long one ;
“ I must pass on more rapidly.

“ All day had been spent in battling with the
“ wind and water when the lovers neared their
“ haven. They had eaten nothing since they
“ started, and the maiden lay faint and numbed
“ at the bottom of the boat. Exhaustion had so
“ told upon her that something warned the youth
“ she must have warmth and shelter soon, or
“ she would die. Weary as he was himself, he
“ strained every muscle to keep their head
“ straight for the point they would fain reach,
“ and they were upon it too near to reverse their
“ course, when his companion rose with a shriek,
“ and pointed to a dark mass on the shore moving
“ down towards them. It was a troop of horse-
“ men, and the sub-prior was at their head. The
“ waves threw the boat forward ; its passengers
“ were captives once again.

“ ‘ Ungrateful one,’ said the priest, as the youth
“ suffered himself to be bound without a word ;
“ ‘ this, then, is my return for all the anxious
“ care I have bestowed upon your affairs. Rouse
“ yourself, weak, sinful daughter,’ he continued,
“ shaking her inanimate and prostrate form with
“ rude familiarity.

“ The youth ground his teeth together, but he

“ was impotent. He was carried to a led horse,
“ while the others gathered round his mistress.
“ Hers was the better fate, and death had gently
“ loosed the virgin spirit from a vessel too pure
“ for aught dishonouring. Trusty lay brethren
“ were deputed to remain with the tender corpse,
“ and convey it reverently home. This done, the
“ sub-prior conducted the cavalcade back to the
“ monastery, and the youth was thrust into a
“ lonely cell to await his sentence.

“ At midnight the monks were all astir, and
“ every stall in the church was full as he was led
“ in. The high-altar was draped in black, and
“ a solemn requiem was chanted, for the quick
“ would soon be dead. On its conclusion the
“ prior stood up, and arraigned the prisoner.
“ He had traitorously rebelled against his vows,
“ and the just wrath of God must be appeased.
“ Instead of remaining steadfast, consecrated to
“ the service of heaven, he had secretly hankered
“ after the filthiness of the flesh ; he had touched
“ the unclean thing, and must expiate his crime
“ by death. By that way alone—the way of
“ lingering starvation—could he hope to find
“ the Divine Mercy, though it might well be
“ thought that there could be no pity at the
“ Throne of Grace for such misdeeds as his.
“ The prior then gave the word to proceed to
“ the caves. It was caught up by the throng,

“and ‘To the Caves!’ resounded on all sides
“with fatal though muffled distinctness.

“The wretched victim started, and fell upon
“his knees.

“‘Father,—’ he cried in his despair.

“‘Hence, child of Satan,’ thundered the prior.

“‘Call not me father, vile spawn of hell.’ He
“waved his hand, and the procession moved
“forward to a loud and jubilant strain.

‘Pange lingua gloriosi
Proelium certaminis.’

“As the last notes of the hymn died away
“along the cavernous roof the stones were
“already being laid just where the door now
“stands which roused your curiosity. A solid
“barrier was soon raised, and the prior pro-
“nounced sentence of excommunication upon any
“one who should attempt to meddle with it.
“The monks had a superstitious dread of the
“place, and speedily retreated to their distant
“quarters.

“Three days later, when the religious house
“had begun to settle down to its old routine,
“the lady of the castle made her appearance
“again before the prior. He was about to
“express sympathy with her bereavement
“when she interrupted him by a contemptuous
“gesture.

“ ‘Peace, unhappy man,’ she said ; ‘keep your
“ill-timed pity for yourself. Have you no
“thought of the innocent boy whom you have
“buried alive?’

“ A sudden panic seized the object of this
“taunt, and robbed him of the power to rebuke
“her insolence.

“ ‘A profligate, a traitor to his Order, he was
“nothing to me,’ he gasped.

“ ‘He was your son,’ replied the lady, in an
“icy tone ; ‘the union which he sought was
“with his own half-sister.’

“The prior’s lips moved, but nothing came
“from them.

“ ‘When he was born, a month after my
“marriage,’ she continued, ‘I gave him to an
“aged dame who was bound to me by strong
“interest, and she brought up the child until she
“died. I sent him to the monastery, and he
“had taken the vows before he knew their im-
“port. Ask old Roger ; he will bear me out in
“this. Your infidelity could not drive me to
“the step which I have taken. Even though
“it hurt me once, I never let it urge me to injure
“you. But when you took away my land, and
“threatened me, I thirsted to strike the blow
“that has been in my power so long, and now I
“have my revenge.’

“ Her calculated coolness throughout was doing

“ its work ; she could see how every stab told on
“ him.

“ ‘ A lying tale, woman,’ he said at last, and
“ his voice was very tremulous and hollow. ‘ The
“ dame is dead, and you have no proof.’ But all
“ the time his conscience knew the truth, and
“ that her words contained it.

“ ‘ There was a gem in my possession which
“ you have seen.’ An involuntary movement
“ showed how he remembered it. She enjoyed
“ his agony for a moment, and went on. ‘ Upon
“ it were engraved the initials of the two names
“ by which we called each other then. Under
“ the most favourable conjunction of Jupiter and
“ the Sun I set it apart for an amulet, and when
“ the boy left his foster-mother he wore it round
“ his neck. Judge whether it be there still, or
“ the needs of the Church have required it of
“ him.’

“ It was her parting gibe, and for a time he
“ remained sitting in a stupor, as she had left
“ him. Father Silvester found him later tear-
“ ing with bleeding fingers at the stones which
“ blocked up the entrance to the caves. His
“ muttered prayers and groans prevented him
“ from hearing the intruder, and it was only
“ when the latter plucked him by the shoulder
“ that he turned round to confront him, uttering
“ as he did so an exclamation of horror.

“ ‘Child of Satan though he was, your blood
“ran in his veins after all, it seems.’ There was
“mocking irony in the sub-prior’s voice, and his
“miserable victim made as though he would
“have struck him to the earth. The other
“stepped back hastily, and produced a crowbar
“and pickaxe which were concealed in a dark
“corner. The prior forgot his resentment, and
“seizing one of the tools, began to loosen the
“stones from the mortar in which they were
“embedded.

“ ‘Quick,’ he cried, ‘even yet he may be
“living. Hark ; I hear him call.’

“Silvester hesitated. Could it be ? Tush !
“these were the idle ravings of a lunatic. They
“worked on together at the breach, the prior
“getting through as soon as it was large enough
“to admit him. His colleague watched him
“eagerly for a moment as he peered about with
“his lantern, and then stole back through the
“church into the monastery. Hurriedly collect-
“ing the monks, he hastened with them to the
“caves. Looking through the opening they saw
“the prior stretched upon the ground beside the
“emaciated form of the murdered youth. The
“sub-prior entered to gaze upon the pair. The
“son’s body was still warm, and the father had
“fainted upon it. A few seconds’ earlier relief

“might not have been vain. Silvester stooped,
“and unclasped the amulet from the dead man’s
“neck, slipping it from the chain which the
“prior’s hand clutched firmly. Then he came
“softly to the brethren, and explained to them
“the whole strange sight. He showed them the
“lady’s jewel, and made them understand the
“initials which it bore. The circle of proof was
“completed by the discovery of the implements
“brought there, so said the sub-prior, by the
“guilty wretch in stealth that he might privily
“rescue his flesh and blood.

“The monks were satisfied, and sorrowfully
“obeyed when their superior bade them assist in
“closing up the breach again.

“‘They have been separated for a life-time,’
“he concluded; ‘let them rot together; and
“may the excommunication which he pronounced
“be upon his own head,’ he muttered between
“his teeth.

* * * * *

“‘Men say that the great rift in the rock
“above our heads was caused by an earthquake
“on the very night when the dead and living
“were sealed up here for company. The rent is
“only thirty feet deep, and could give no way of
“escape to the dying man even had he wished
“for it. The barricade of stones remained for

“years ; and when it fell to pieces the superstition of a new generation of monks set up this massive door in its place to shut in the ghosts of the starved prisoners. A sad memorial of crime and violence, it has lasted in the place ever since. But of the two who perished then at least one was innocent, and we may trust has found such sustenance and glorious liberty as he never dreamed of upon earth at the eternal Marriage-Supper.’ ”

The old man ceased, and for a minute or two the silence was unbroken. Arnold had seen the tears stand in Ursula’s eyes more than once during their guide’s narrative. At its close something seemed to sparkle for a moment at her feet. The dry sand was greedy of such offerings, and it had faded before Arnold could trace its origin. But Heaven does not permit its creatures to be more gracious than itself, and for every drop of compassion shed by human eyes rains down a plenteous stream of loving-kindness upon our petty toil and suffering.

The air was radiant as they descended the hill, and the sea lay in a purple calm. Whatever secrets lay underneath, its surface was unwrinkled and expressionless.

“Good-bye,” said Miss Hilda, as the clergy-

man assisted her into the carriage, "we owe you so much gratitude for your pretty story. Poor young things; I declare I can hardly get their sad lot out of my head."

She enjoyed a pleasant doze during the drive home, as the others for some reason or other were not inclined to talk. Perhaps the interest attaching to the caves had taken even firmer hold of their heads than it had of the Mother Superior's.

It may have been that in the ironical game of hide-and-seek which Fate never tires of playing with us some presage of a deeper ground for their sympathy was darkly present in the minds of the three others, a faint suspicion of analogy between the future that was yet in store for them and that dim legendary outline of the past. Had they been listening to a necromantic casting of their own horoscopes? The feeling was scarcely strong enough to do more than suggest the notion. They could almost believe themselves to be within guessing distance of the truth. But Fate was obdurate, and having lured them to the pursuit, would give no further clue. Nevertheless, prodigal though she be of details, her poverty in conceiving general outlines is so remarkable that it is a wonder she is not caught more often quite early in the game. And so she

might be, were it not for her crafty delusion of each of us into emphasising unwarily the peculiarity of our details, and for the difficulties she throws in the way of our getting a sweeping survey of our lives with their various environments through the telescope of some exterior observatory. 93

END OF VOLUME I.



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